'Hers Is A Body In Trouble With Language:'

Seventeenth-Century Female Prophecy As Text And Experience

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of female prophecy as it is constituted, represented or performed in seventeenth-century texts. I consider both the way in which prophecy is socially constructed and the role of prophetic experience in the development of feminine subjectivity. I argue that interpreting prophecy within the context of psychopathology or feminism (to take two examples of critical practice) colludes in the early modern objectification of women's speech and somatic experience. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I argue that prophecy needs to be understood as a media event and as a site of discursive proliferation. In this study, I examine texts which participate in the explication of a prophetic event and interrogate their intentions and functions. I suggest that an inclusive reading of prophecy allows the critic to recuperate women's agency.

My study of prophecy combines the seventeenth-century notion of prophecy as a category for diverse linguistic and bodily manifestations with an analysis of the rhetorical strategies of the prophetic text. In the course of this thesis I consider: 1. the work of various scholars who have attempted to explicate the relations between gender and radical religiosity; 2. how a comparison between hysteria and prophecy illuminates the primacy of psychopathology in the interpretation of seventeenth- and nineteenth-century women's experience; 3. the interplay between scriptural models of prophecy and early modern biblical exegesis; 4. the role of texts in (in)validating female bodily experience and 5. how seventeenth-century antisectarian texts attempt to police the female creative imagination.

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Author's Note:

The quotation 'Hers is a body in trouble with language' included in the title of this thesis is taken from Stephen Heath's article 'Difference' in *Screen* 19 (1978), p. 56.

Introduction:

Approaching Prophecy:

The Body/Language Dialectic

This thesis is an analysis of seventeenth-century women's prophetic experience as it is constituted, represented or enacted in (auto)biographical texts. I interrogate the intentions and functions of these texts, which themselves are located at sites of confluence, where ideas of gender, religion, culture, economics and politics converge. I define prophecy according to its seventeenth-century paradigm, as a point of contact with the divine which leads to a variety of religious experiences, including revelation, divination, ecstacy and mysticism. I look at how agency and subjectivity are produced by female subjects and the role of writing and witnessing in this activity, which must negotiate ideals of female religious behaviour which stress passivity and dependency.

Prophecy-as-experience is mediated through texts, which are not simply vehicles of transmission, themselves revealing and making tangible the 'ineffable' logos: I suggest the need to perceive prophecy as *both* bodily experience and text/language. Biblical prophecy is generally perceived as highly complex, cryptic language, revealing its deep secrets through repeated readings or not at all. The models of subsequent prophetic language, of which Daniel and Revelation were particularly influential in the seventeenth century, are supremely difficult texts: their difficulty constitutes their authority.

Reading the writings of Eleanor Davies, the aristocratic prophetess, one is struck by the same difficulty, in texts which are full of direct quotations from the scriptures and even more oblique references to it, which Davies obviously expects her readers to recognize. Does prophetic language replicate itself, its dominant feature of apocalyptic imminence altered only to match the

prevailing social conditions? Prophecy does not simply reflect cultural conditions, it is constituted *by* them.

I argue that the prophetic text has many social and personal functions, and draw on other contemporary writings on conversion experiences, religious melancholy and despair to illustrate this. The text may explicate scriptural difficulty, combining textual interpretation with privileged insight into current events, or it may mystify, tantalize and exasperate. From a perspective on gender and subjectivity, the role of the text as a form of psychotherapy or space for arguing an intellectual or theological position is particularly compelling. Women who have undergone experiences of a traumatic nature, either because they occupy a borderline position between religion and madness, or they feel disempowered by the judgemental appropriation of their experiences by others, find in articulacy the therapeutic benefits of making their case and reconstituting experience into a persuasive, intelligible narrative, from the relative security of a retrospective position. Because women do not produce the theory of religious and secular behaviour, normalcy and madness, they are faced with being categorized (an experience which compounds the original trauma) and the struggle to recover from that position.

My concern with the female subject extends to the appropriation of female behaviour, and the functions to which it is put. I suggest a correspondence between religious and secular appropriations of the female subject, drawing on accounts of women who starve themselves for long periods of time, and discussing the various explanations of this phenomenon which are in reality attempts to subsume the autonomy and identity of the woman concerned into the specific system of ideas propounded by the male writer/observer.

I argue that in cases where the experience is of a psychological or somatic nature, such as fasting and mystical trance, the woman's reduced ability to speak for herself, overdetermines her being construed as mere *evidentia*. The accounts also suggest how we might question the ascription of the terms 'religious' and 'secular,' and the seeming arbitrariness of the masculine 'eye of the beholder.' I suggest the need to at least allow for the possibility of the individual woman's subjective reasoning and understanding of her experience.

The first chapter considers approaches to the role of women in radical religion from sociology, anthropology, comparative religion, literature, feminist theory and psychology. 'Radical religion' refers to such groups defined as cults, sects and non-conformists, although not all of the seventeenth-century women who will be discussed in later chapters are members of such groups. Nevertheless, the term is useful when speaking of gender because it poses questions about the degree of personal and social empowerment available to women who join radical movements. Theorists from the various disciplines cited above have noted how women make up a significant proportion of the membership of these groups, a principle which applies throughout history and in different cultural environments. Using the work of social theorists like Max Weber and Victor Turner, I will debate the explanations for women's participation, and suggest the implications for historical research.

Theorists have attempted to account for the slippage between public veneration and notoriety, between which women like Anna Trapnel and Eleanor Davies seem constantly to vacillate between, suggests each position occupies one side of an identical coin. As the

work of feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément suggests, the liminal position of the woman prophet ensures that her assimilation into the public space is never complete, always partial. She is thus sensitive to the mercurial nature of public opinion, which may periodically concur with her political and social transgression, and at other times condemn it.

In chapter two, I compare prophecy with hysteria. Hysteria is a particularly apposite phenomenon to compare with prophecy since aspects of this disease provide illumination on our interpretation of female prophecy. Like the issue of women's participation in sectarian and nonconformist religion, hysteria has been studied historically and cross-culturally. Both have been subject to epidemiological methods of analysis, where they are perceived as culture-bound phenomena. Much has been written on the exponential growth in cases of hysteria in the nineteenth century; similarly, the significance of the Civil War in the 1640s-1660s on the incidence of women's religious radicalism (and of men's) has become virtually a commonplace. Therefore, both prophecy and hysteria are thought to be symptomatic of their era. What do they tell the historian about women in those eras? Specifically, is the 'radical visibility' of seventeenth-century women prophets descriptive of the social and economic circumstances of the majority of the female population, about whom we know much less and whose 'voices' are barely accessible?

Secondly, the interpretation of hysteria and, by association, female prophecy will be considered. Specifically, I will examine the 'functionalism' of hysteria, unique in medical nosology as a disease of physical symptoms but lacking a physiological cause. As I shall demonstrate, hysteria has throughout its long history perplexed

physicians who, prior to the nineteenth century at least, had been trained to treat diseases which had detectable somatic causes. The perplexity male doctors felt when faced with female hysterics (and from the seventeenth century nervous disorder underwent a gender split into the masculine hypochondria and the feminine hysteria) frequently evolved into exasperation and a certain lapse of clinical detachment. The predecessor of the hysteric was the witch, a cultural shift from 'bad' to 'sick.' But hysteria never entirely lost its association with the malicious and dangerous witch, at least that witch who was figured not as a passive victim of demonic forces, but one who actively colluded in her own damnation and appeared to enjoy tormenting others. Even as it became a syndrome, hysteria's very nature questioned the authenticity of the woman who suffered it: was she sick, or was she pretending?

Like prophecy, hysteria is visible only through its symptoms. Both seem to provoke scepticism in equal measure to belief and acceptance. Both are affected by the trope of the actress, as I will demonstrate with examples of male observations of the duplicitous hysteric. The sectarian woman was commonly regarded as self-consciously fraudulent. She is depicted as a seductress, and men who unwisely listen to her are infected by the sect whose beliefs she peddles.

A third aspect, related to the second, is the parity between women's 'normal' and deviant behaviour. Emotionally, women are typified as labile, unstable, irrational and prone to self-dramatization. It is impossible to speak about hysteria without attending to the woman's (emotional) place. Hysterics *respond* to expectations about infantility, dependency and histrionics. They take their socialized role to its ultimate conclusion. It is not an exaggeration to argue that male physicians are repelled by

hysterics, who embody and caricature the femininity which represents an affront to rational man. The proximity between normality and deviance in women's behaviour has implications for a study of woman prophets because it sheds light upon the stereotyped attacks on women's roles in radical religiosity.

Chapter three traces the theological and cultural attitudes to the Bible, in the light of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history, religious conflict and printing. The debates about the interpretation of scripture, the preservation of meaning and the problems of public access to the vernacular Bible will be considered within the context of seventeenth-century culture. An overview of religious developments from the 1590s to the 1660s will be given.

This chapter will focus upon the Bible and attitudes towards women's religious activity. The Bible will be discussed as a palimpsest text, or collection of multiple texts, which did not cumulatively prohibit all social, religious and economic rights for women. Selective appropriation, or excision of certain books or quotations from scripture, was universally practised by individuals and groups, who sought authority for their beliefs. Such was the case for misogynists, who, it must be said, had more than their fair share of evidence from the Bible to support their case. Notable were Genesis's story of the banishment from the garden of Eden, and St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians and to Timothy, which stipulated that women should be silent in church, must not teach, and should speak to their husbands if they have any questions about the faith.

Many violently antifeminist texts of the seventeenth century, such as *A Spirit Moving in the Women Preachers* (1646) *A Discoverie of Six women preachers* (1641) and *The Holy Sisters Conspiracy against their*

Husbands (1661) expressed horror at women's impudence at breaking the rule of silence, meekness and subservience. Their authors argued that Paul's rulings to the new church at Corinth made perfect sense after what Eve had done to Adam and all mankind. Not only were women incompetent and often blasphemous preachers, deluding themselves and others, they were refusing to submit to God's laws.

Many women joined sects which had rejected the nonconformist principle of remaining within the established church. These radical sects generally permitted women a more active role in religious activities, some allowing women to preach. Many sects and nonconformist groups were reliant on their women members, especially after the conventicle laws outlawing unauthorized public religious worship. The home became a vital meeting place for secret meetings and hospitality. Women also were instrumental in organising church activities.

Emergent sectarian movements, like the Diggers, Ranters, Quakers and Fifth Monarchists, were attractive to women, who constituted a disprivileged group. The sect did not necessarily offer emancipation for women, since its power to effect sustained socio-economic change was obviously limited. Nevertheless, sectarian activity was widespread enough in the seventeenth century to create anxieties amongst the protestant community.

Some women saw the Bible, as many people understood and interpreted it, as a serious obstacle to the social, religious and economic liberation of women. Certain books of scripture were assumed to speak for the Bible in its entirety, as a justification for women's inequality. To contest antifeminist readings of scripture, women entered the arena from which women had been traditionally excluded, but to which they now had access, thanks to the recent innovation of

print. They joined the intellectual and theological debates about Biblical interpretation, women's access to education and literacy, religious participation and misogyny.

Many of these women I will look at, including Margaret Fell Fox, Mary Astell, M.M. and other anonymous pamphleteers, have been described as feminists. I prefer the term 'proto-feminist,' but it is true that the women who confronted the gamut of ideas and stereotypes which restricted their abilities and aspirations were recovering their sex and attempting to empower themselves.

I will discuss the writings of these women, as they attempt to negotiate the problems of religious and sexual obedience with more radical arguments on women's roles in religion and society. I will also discuss in detail the work of the late seventeenth- early eighteenth-century writer M.M., who develops a radical feminist hermeneutics of the Bible. Her 'solution' to the problem of attacks on women via scriptural exegesis is to argue that the Bible has been misinterpreted and misused, to the detriment of Christian belief. Instead of avoiding a seemingly intractable problem in the Bible, M.M. takes her reader into the text, and makes her eminently reasonable, persuasive case--that women could not carve out a spiritual niche for themselves within the perimeters of a theology defined by men. They had to innovate, and challenge the assumptions about gender and religion which conferred upon them a secondary status.

In chapter four I will analyse the meanings and interpretations of women's ecstatic bodily experiences, characterized by a prostrate, immobile body which suffers various afflictions, abstains from food and (in most cases) survives until being revived by God. The miraculously afflicted body, even if it has no voice,

speaks powerfully to observers of the ability of God to descend into ordinary communities, and represents a sign which is open to interpretation. Does the afflicted female body express the piety of the subject better than her voice, which may remain suspect?

I look at the responses of science and religion to the phenomenon of fasting or self-starvation, to argue that the act of defining behaviour as pious or secular/naturally-occurring is not so simple as seventeenth-century accounts of cases of such women might suggest. In addition to cases of mysticism in which fasting is a feature, such as Anna Trapnel's ecstacy, I look at cases of secular, so-called 'fasting girls,' who have been assessed as non-miraculous by contemporary physicians who investigated their stories and prodded their emaciated bodies. I also discuss the case of Martha Taylor, whose case generated a number of texts purporting to explain her situation.

Early modern female inedia constitutes an anomalous cultural event in which the competing ideologies of religion and science collide. I base my argument on a study of borderline cases of female inedia, both printed texts and manuscripts, contesting the belief that inedia can be clearly differentiated into religious or secular categories. My intention is to recuperate the agency of the female subject, which has consistently been ignored by discussions of seventeenth-century inedia. I suggest that science did not consistently maintain a position of rational detachment in relation to women abstinents, as has previously been assumed. The physicians who examined the bodies of fasting women as part of the processes of verification have not had their authority or credibility questioned. Yet I demonstrate the invasiveness of the medical methodology and the bias of the consulting physician.

As well as discussing the appropriation of female inedia, this chapter assesses how women can exploit the processes of legal and medical verification in order to represent their experiences in their own terms. Women were not necessarily relegated to a position of passivity within the text, they could empower themselves by exploiting the very conventions which verified their viability as 'evidence' and thus ensured the authority of the text.

The fifth chapter assesses the figure of the mother in the cultural imagination, analysing texts which expose allegedly 'false' women prophets and cases where women claim to be pregnant with the Second Coming of the Messiah. Antisectarian literature utilized the monstrous and/or violent mother as a trope to argue that radical religion threatened community life. These are texts which demonstrate the behaviour of women in the father's absence. I suggest that such literature functions to keep women under surveillance, and effectively demonizes the generative and creative potency of the woman as author. I argue that the maternal narrative, as produced by women like Eleanor Davies, is disrupted because it constitutes an instrument for the transmission of a toxic and contagious femininity. The culturally acceptable method for representing women in print is via the mediation of a masculinist presence.

Secondly, this chapter considers the relationship between nonconformist ministers and women afflicted with despair. Conversion texts present the recovery of the subject as a vindication of the minister's perseverance and provides a message of support to other members of the brethren who are similarly afflicted. I dispute whether the concept of prodigality which is available to men who undergo a religious conversion experience is similarly accessible to women. Whereas conversion in men is perceived as a ritual of

maturation, women experiencing despair are treated as infantile and deluded. Their destructive behaviour reverberates within the household, threatening family and by implication social order. The disorder necessitates the intervention of a minister, whose task is to 'master' an unstable and wild female figure. I suggest that the minister acts as a surrogate father, who re-establishes patriarchal authority and disciplines the errant daughter. My argument is that such conversion narratives give tantalizing glimpses of fissures within the family romance, but these are elided by the reconstitution of women's resistance as a symptom of satanic delusion. Although the conversion narrative, like texts on maternal violence, is a mediated text, the femininity it attempts to contain still proves excessive to its restraints.

The title to this introduction conceptualizes the preoccupations of my thesis. A theory of seventeenth-century prophecy must consider the body as well as language, and the manner in which representations of women's prophetic experience negotiate between them. It must above all treat prophecy as a cultural event, in which texts both record and participate in the debate about the relationship between gender and prophecy. The unruly plurality of a debate, with its cacophany of competing voices and contradictory arguments, is an appropriate metaphor for the position of the female prophet in relation to seventeenth-century culture. She elicited condemnation as well as praise, sometimes simultaneously, and remained a consistently ambivalent and potentially eruptive figure.

Chapter One:

(En)gendering 'Radical' Religiosity:

Theoretical Perspectives on Women, Religion and Culture

(Not) A Woman's Place?: Radicalism and its Representations

In his conduct book *The Compleat Woman*, which was translated into English in 1639, Jacques Du Bosqu alerts his exemplary female audience to the dangers of a putative 'excess' of religiosity. He asserts:

> True it is, that those *women* who make so many ceremonies, and practice so many subtilties to deceiue some eies, under a pretext of conscience, resemble Spiders which take a great deale of paines to make their webs, wherein they are tampered without any other profit then to catch flies...As for my part, I cannot conceive how a *Compleat Woman* can take dreams for revelations, permitting herself to be abused with so many illusions, and phantasies...As wel in Religion as in Societie, fayning is wholy worthy of blame; and this great shew at least is suspected if it be not vicious.[1]

By bringing into disrepute what he perceives as visible and consequently provocative expressions of religiosity by women, Du Bosqu constructs an ideal of *appropriate* feminine piety which is unseen: in other words, privatized and domestic. The desire to be looked upon is *assumed* in women whose religious practice engages with the public gaze. 'Ostentatious' piety equals self-aggrandizement, a "great shew" indicating, if not outright guilt, at least suspicious behaviour. In practice, this amounts to the same thing.

In contrast to the 'minimal' woman whose religiosity takes place

within a domestic context, Du Bosqu's figure of feminine excess is personified as a spider, ensnaring and manipulating her audience in an insatiable hunger for power. Du Bosqu's intention is to argue his *in*"Compleat Woman" into insignificance, but nevertheless the threat she constitutes is implicit in his text. Herself a seductress, she is enticed by the irrationality common to her sex.[2] She is both deluded and consciously sets out to delude.

The visions she claims to experience are 'diagnosed' by Du Bosqu as hallucinatory "dreams...illusions, and phantasies." Thus experiences which would be validated as ecstatic or mystical in other contexts, are dismissed as the products of defective female imagination. Du Bosqu suggests that women can (almost) perfect themselves by inclining their sensibilities towards reason and a rational, androcentric concept of religion. He implies that the process of becoming a "Compleat Woman" is in actuality one of becoming more like a man, following the Aristotelean notion of woman as defective man.[3] The conduct book for women constitutes an eminently rational and patriarchal text offered by a male author to restore a perceived physiological 'lack.[4]

As Grace Jantzen has noted, the privatization of women's religiosity is an attempt to depoliticize female experience.[5] Had Du Bosqu been writing in the 1640s and 50s, upon observing the post-civil war proliferation of radical sectarian activity in England, his version of the stereotype of the self-dramatizing woman might have been represented in terms of graphic, catastrophic violence inflicted upon the social fabric, rather than the comparative decorum with which the Frenchman appeals to women of gentle breeding to behave with humility and discretion. Like the anti-enthusiast pamphleteers who produced such works as *Gangraena* (1646), Du Bosqu

tries to make a case for the total excision of women's religiosity from the public sphere.[6] But what is implicit in Du Bosqu's text is made more overt in the pamphlets, whose authors prophesy social breakdown as an inevitable consequence of what they represent as the willing absorption of women by the revolutionary sects. To those who were hostile to the sects or involved in marketing such hostility, the Scottish Calvinist John Knox's image of a "Monstrous Regiment of Women" became a familiar trope in seventeenth-century polemical tracts. Any enquiry into this putative relationship must consider first what we mean by 'the radicals,' and second, whether it is possible to posit an uncomplicated, univocal relation between radicalism and gender.

The sects, which included the Quakers, Ranters, Levellers, Fifth Monarchists and Anabaptists, had widely varying spiritual, socio-economic and political programmes of reform. But they were by no means a homogenous 'movement,' except in the eyes of those who criticised them. For the purposes of differentiating sectarianism from other constituted modes of religious practice within seventeenth-century protestant England, the sects believed that there was no way of preserving the purity of their spiritual vision without separation from the Church of England, which was a drastic and absolute move. This was in contrast to the nonconformists, who chose to remain within the established church but had sufficient reservations about it to lobby for reform, and when this was not forthcoming, to institute a number of modifications to their own religious practices.

For the historian, attempting to situate 'woman' within seventeenth-century sectarian religion is complicated by the political and ideological ambiguities of the appropriately named

'pamphlet wars,' which were essentially concerned with the question of whether or not religious dissent should be tolerated.[7] This dissent was the inevitable but unintentional result of the influence of English militant protestantism and the Calvinist doctrines it adopted during Elizabeth I's reign. Ministers encouraged lay assertiveness, teaching individuals that they were responsible for their own salvation, and people began to think that this was ultimately more important than obedience to social institutions. It became clear that the promotion of individualism was at the expense of social cohesion.[8]

Writers who implicated the role of women in their condemnation of religious dissent were not necessarily advocates either of Anglicanism or the establishment. The attribution and precise meaning of 'dissent' is contingent upon who is using it. Thomas Edward's catalogue of sectarian "Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices" can be said to constitute an indiscriminate attack on separatism in general. But a pamphlet by two Quaker women, Mary Ellwood and Margery Clipsham, exposing Susanna Aldridge, formerly one of their number, as a false prophet possessed by an "adulterated Spirit," underscores the futility of attempting to render the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century problem of religious belief in an increasingly pluralistic society into a series of binary oppositions.[9] 'Sectaries,' as they were derogatively termed, were portrayed as "factious fellowes" who revelled in violence and schism.[10] But of course separatists and non-conformists alike were acutely aware that their communities were vulnerable enclaves in a world which was at the very least resistant to their beliefs and predictions. In the face of opposition and persecution, they could not afford complacency. So Ellwood and Clipsham warn of insurgency:

the threat from *within* should concern the Friends at least as much as general animosity from non-Quakers.

A comparison of some of the pamphlets which have been located under the rubric of 'anti-sectarianism' should give the reader a sense that such classifications can never be unproblematic. It is probable that the distinctions and assumptions we could make about religious belief in this period would not be recognized by seventeenth-century actors. Although readers need to be aware that texts like those by Edwards and Clipsham and Ellwood are differently constituted by institutional and individual variables, I am suggesting that they deploy the figure of the subversive woman in strikingly similar ways. I will consider this point in relation to three examples.

In *Gangraena*, the minister Thomas Edwards presents himself not as an author but rather as an editor, performing a public service by collating and publishing the reports and testimonials he has received about 'subversive' sectarian activities. Edwards relates part of a letter from a minister in Colchester: "Sir, I have sent you in this enclosed, the true Story of the monstrous birth in our Town. I thank you for your Book: The Sectaries rage at it, but it is a signe it doth the more good."[11] Although Edwards does not focus exclusively upon women to make his point that sectarian religion constitutes a serious social threat, the role of women is pivotal to his reasoning as to why the sects must not be tolerated. He lists 176 "errors" made by people who naively regard the sects as innocuous. Among these is one which, it is implied, has allowed the monstrous proliferation of sectarian women: "That 'tis lawfull for women to preach, and why should they not, having gifts as well as men? and some of them do actually preach, having great resort to them."[12]

One of Edwards's accounts is written by an individual referred to

only as S.F., who describes the godly work he undertook in the Dorset town of Poole, where his garrison was stationed. He found the people seduced by "Antinomian Errours,"[13] and laments the fact that "the smoking tayles of those London Fire-brands, which retard the work, have fumed the West too; the Divel that kindles them, is so very busie in his work of compassing the Land."[14]

S.F and his co-partner Mr. B. organised meetings to demonstrate to people the erroneous nature of sectarian doctrine. After one of these meetings, they succeeded in persuading the majority of those who attended, but there remained a minority of people who were still resistant to their arguments. The two ministers were invited by these people to meet with an Anabaptist woman prophet, so that the ministers could see for themselves the righteousness of Anabaptist faith. S.F. remarks of the woman's alleged revelations: "It is probable...the Divil had had his Oar too in the Boat." She claimed that Christ revealed himself to her, and had told her that she must not have her recently-born child baptized. Because she was in the state of 'lying-in' after the birth and perceived as "weakly," S.F. and Mr. B. refrained from engaging her in serious theological argument. They intended to return when she was stronger.

On the following Sabbath, S.F. gave a sermon on how the devil assumes the appearance of an angel to deceive mankind. Next day, the ministers heard that the Anabaptist woman "was grown perfectly distracted." S.F. went back to see her, and upon questioning her, learned how "she cryes out of seeing and smelling the Divel in every thing almost." He adds that the other Anabaptists "laboured by intreaties and pretences to conceal" what had happened to this woman, but quotes Isaiah 26:11 ("they will not see, but they shall see") as irrefutable proof that God's plan against sectarian error must

triumph. Many people, he asserts, were saved from "the snare."[15]

S.F.'s choice of the word 'snare' is significant: the universal belief that all acts of malevolent imposture ultimately issued from the devil and were controlled by him, co-existed with the assumption that the *local* site of seduction and deceit was the feminine. Women's supposed credulity never excused, but always implicated them. As the witch or (putatively false) prophet, the weakness-in-nature that was woman realized her latent potential as weakness-in-culture.[16] It was logical that the devil would attempt to infiltrate mankind at its weakest point. Sexually open and morally imbecible, women were the willing recipients *and* instruments of demonic seduction.

In S.F.'s account, the Anabaptist woman usurps the (masculine) position of leader by enticing her followers with her 'pretended' revelations. Their obsession with her leads them to try to suppress the truth when her prophecies and revelations are exposed as false and she descends into madness. But the false woman prophet was not only a figure of allurement. Even more disturbingly, she perverted her maternal role and put at risk the physical and spiritual health of any child who was unfortunate enough to have her as its mother. The lurid accounts of women refusing infant baptism and then giving birth to monsters or committing infanticide are demonstrative of a link between sectarianism, particularly Anabaptism, and deviant women.[17]

Why is the agent of sectarian casuistry commonly a woman? In the case of an anti-Anabaptist pamphlet like *Bloody Newes from Dover*, the author assumes that his readers will know that the rejection of infant baptism is a deviation from religious orthodoxy. He represents it in terms of its effects as a violation of familial order, the family being the basic unit of patriarchy. The illustration on the title-page of this pamphlet is making an explicit

association between the notion of the mad woman/bad mother and the female sectary.

The perpetrator is a woman, her victims are her child and her husband. Mary Champion shows her husband John the severed head of their child, whom she has just murdered. Both the head and body are bleeding copiously. Mary's act of 'brazenly' showing what she has done indicates the absence of shame, remorse or maternal feeling. John Champion's arms are raised, indicating his horror at the carnage. Above Mary's head is written the word 'Anabaptist,' John is identified as a 'Presbyterian.'[18]

The effect of this textual insertion could be analogous to a tabloid banner headline: 'Anabaptists Murder Children.' Or perhaps the Anabaptist woman, precisely because she *should* have been inhibited from committing 'unnatural' infanticide, became representative of a sect whose opponents wanted to portray it as enthusiastically anarchic. The question as to why women figure considerably in negative portrayals of sectarian activity can be answered, at least in part, by thinking about what they represent.

Ellwood and Clipsham's *The SPIRIT* (1685) counters the facile assumption that attacks on so-called 'sectarian' women were the sole province of misogynists, and it suggests the possible recognition that there was a 'feminine' character to internal religious disruption. They write in response to a book by an erstwhile Quaker, Susanna Aldridge, entitled *Abominations in Jerusalem Discovered.* Aldridge is described as never having been an authentic Quaker. Although her parents raised her as a Quaker and as an adult she took an active part in local meetings for many years, the authors point out: "*in all that time she had not been faithful to the Power of the*

Lord, nor witnessed the Work of Truth in her own heart." Aldridge's career as a 'false' prophet began after she gave birth to a child. She suffered what modern clinicians would diagnose as post-partum psychosis. She became "weak, and disordered in her Head (a Distemper which divers of her Relations have been subject to, and her own Mother dyed in, soon after the time of her Birth, as we have been credibly informed)." This condition, the authors argue, caused "strong Imaginations," and as soon as Aldridge had recovered enough to leave her sick-bed, "she came forth again with a pretence of Visions and Revelations."[19]

Aldridge became increasingly active in meetings against those who came to criticise Quaker beliefs. Ellwood and Clipsham assert that she became something of an embarrassment to the other Quakers, who tried to be patient nevertheless. One day,at a meeting held at the Jordan household, Aldridge began to exhibit 'symptoms' of ecstasy:

> [she] brake forth in so great a disorder of Spirit, and disturbance of Mind (with so strange a Voice and Gesture) that many, who before had better hopes of her, went away grieved, fearing lest she should be distracted.[20]

The intention of Ellwood and Clipsham's reconstruction of the events leading up to the publication of *Abominations* is to deny Aldridge any credibility. In the passage quoted above, she is described as "distracted," an early modern term for a mental illness characterised by inarticulacy.[21] Aldridge's claims of divine revelation and visions are being represented, not as coherent, plausible speech, but as non-sense. The behaviour of the audience

confirms its true Quaker qualities. Although exasperated by Aldridge, people demonstrate patience and humility in putting up with her. Aldridge becomes increasingly histrionic, eventually turning against the Quakers. She accuses them of questioning her status as the prophet of the Lord. Ellwood and Clipsham assert that the Quakers have suffered "Floods of Reproach, Lyes, Slander and Falshood." Aldridge, they argue, had set out to infiltrate their meetings. She assumed the role of a faithful Quaker with her "Fair Speeches," while she was working secretly to "cause *Divisions* among Friends."[22]

The examples we have briefly considered similarly deploy a figure of caricatured femininity in their representations of actual 'sectarian' or subversive women. This figure could be expressed as one of toxic emotionality, simultaneously typifying and exaggerating the so-called 'feminine' traits. As the case of Susanna Aldridge demonstrates, the seductive woman is herself weak, irrational and morally incompetent. Aldridge is descended from an entire female line riven by mental instability.

If they had had access to twentieth-century psychiatric terminology, Ellwood and Clipsham might have argued that Aldridge's belief that she is a prophet has a psychosomatic aetiology. But within the terms of early modern epistemology, Aldridge is not sick but culpable: her weak flesh has ushered in the influence of the devil. The notion that sickness and recovery are sequential is ironically subverted. Ellwood and Clipsham describe how: "after she was up, she came forth again with a pretence of Visions and Revelations, where-with *Friends* were greatly dissatisfied, and burdened."[23] Aldridge is not 'well,' she is infected, and once she has regained ambulant status she goes out, trying to infect others.

Thus she constitutes a threat to the Quaker community's spiritual health. As we saw with the Anabaptist prophetess in *Gangraena* and Mary Champion's infanticide, the public danger (to children, the family, society) is continuously reiterated by the author(s) and morally endorses the writing of the text and its publication.

The fact that Ellwood and Clipsham remark upon Aldridge's re-entry into society after her lying-in, and the consequences of this, is illustrative of the stereotype of the subversive woman, who had a distinctly pathogenic whiff about her. It is important that she was never a passive, unconscious agent of 'infection,' but rather an active participant. Specifically, she was an actress who deployed her full repertoire of histrionic and emotional skills to make herself appear sympathetic and credible.

What might the repetitiveness of this trope of femininity signify in a body of texts which embody radical ideological difference? Is the figure of the dissenting, monstrous woman distilled from the actual active presence of historical women, or does her femininity become the template upon which cultural anxieties are played out?

Neil Hertz's research on the French Revolution has revealed that eye-witness accounts of scenes of social disintegration, anarchy and mob violence seem haunted by reminiscences of a brazen and repulsive femininity. These male observers related incidents where--in confronting a woman--they believed they had come face to face with the revolution. One instance of this is Alexis de Tocqueville's relation of an incident on the second day of street violence on June 24, 1848. An old woman with a vegetable cart bars his way and refuses to move. Tocqueville writes:

> I ended by telling her rather sharply to make room. Instead of

doing so, she left her cart and rushed at me with such sudden frenzy that I had trouble defending myself. I shuddered at the frightful and hideous expression on her face, which reflected demagogic passions and the fury of civil war. I mention this minor fact because I saw in it then, and rightly, a major symptom.[24]

Tocqueville's use of the phrase "major symptom" is powerfully suggestive of the type of response evoked in the male observer by a woman when she participates in or instigates revolutionary or subversive behaviour. Hertz argues that male hysteria can account for why women become emblematic of revolutionary violence. But, as Catherine Gallagher points out in her response to Hertz, the importance of the brazen and sexually disordered woman cannot be separated from the actual threat the French Revolution constituted to patriarchy. It is necessary to think past the originary psychoanalytic spectre of the Medusa and historicise the figure of woman in relation to issues of politics, property and gender.[25] The relationship between representation and women's agency as historical actors is complex and interwoven.

The problem of identifying and representing 'sectarian' women which the first part of this chapter has discussed has several implications for the interrogative position I intend to take. I suggest that it is necessary to unpack the assumed link between 'radical' religion and women, *as well as* attempt to account for it, the latter being an issue which has produced intense cross-disciplinary debate.

Is the belief that sects have an irresistible appeal for women a continuation of the idea that women are 'intrinsically' spiritual,

and if so does this liberate the possibilities for women's spirituality or restrict them? The attitude of theorists towards the role of women in radical religious movements reveals what degree of agency they accord to both women and sects in relation to social dynamics. Is the sect ineffectual, transient, insignificant? Or does it induce revolutionary change in society? What do women *do* in sectarian groups? What effect (if any) do their activities have on the community beyond the sect? Do sects provide opportunities for the personal and social empowerment of women? What about women whose religiosity is ecstatic or prophetic, but who are not members of a sect?

I want to emphasise that while my primary purpose is to study the lives and writings of seventeenth-century women prophets, it is important to think about the gendering of radical religiosity in terms of the history of an *idea*. This is necessary for our understanding of how early modern culture made sense of women like Anna Trapnel and Eleanor Davies, but is also revealing of the assumptions behind twentieth-century explanations as to why radical religious movements are attractive to women. In the next section, I will discuss various critical modalities which have theorised the gendering of radical religiosity, and suggest their implications for historical research.

Approaching the Subject: Negotiating Prophecy

The reader preparing to study seventeenth-century texts by or about women prophets might begin by reviewing the theoretical and critical literature on the subjects of gender and (radical) religion. Any one text generated by this trans-disciplinary debate

constitutes an attempt to locate the figure of the radical religious woman within a specific discourse, such as sociology, feminism, or literary criticism, and as such, offers possiblities for the researcher as a methodological 'tool' to aid their enquiry.

Initially, the reader might think about the relation of radical religion to social theory. She could begin with Max Weber, since even theorists who dispute his ideas acknowledge the longevity of his influence. He situates women's religiosity within what he calls the "disprivileged strata" of society. Weber argues that while the participation of women is a feature of embryonic religious movements, the sect must reject female involvement in favour of an ethos of masculine militarism if it is to survive. Turning from sociology to anthropology, the reader could consider Victor Turner's theory of communitas, which posits the sect as a "phase" within the cycle of social change. Mary Douglas argues that sectarian movements fulfil the needs of marginalised groups within the community for what she calls anti-ritualism.[26]

The reader might also, if only to refute them, consider some of the 'psychological' explanations of radical religious groups, with which women in particular seem to be unfavourably associated. The psychohistorian Alfred Cohen has written on a number of seventeenth-century women prophets and ecstatics, including Anna Trapnel and Martha Hatfield. From the extant biographical evidence, he 'writes up' each woman's life as a case history, diagnosing madness as the cause of her religious behaviour. Robert A. Bridges and Bernard Spilka suggest that religiosity compensates for women's negative self-esteem and frustration caused by restrictive gender roles, although this constitutes an illusion of emancipation, as religion tends to reproduce limited roles for women. Since historical

evidence demonstrates that participation in sectarian groups is not limited to individuals of low social strata, the historian Norman Cohn has argued that socially-privileged women become members because they experience sexual and emotional frustration. Harold Merskey, writing on the treatment of hysterics, argues that these individuals often join sects and cults, and warns that such "unwise group involvement" is detrimental to recovery.[27]

It becomes clear that an effect of some of these models (especially the 'compensatory' type) is to disrupt the authority and agency of sectarian movements and their women members. The stereotyping of women's affect seems to justify the claim that women who participate in sectarian groups manifest every form of mental incompetence in the spectrum, from emotional lability to florid psychosis. In a recent article, Agneta H. Fischer persuasively argues that the stereotype of gender differences in emotionality can no longer be justified.[28]

Recent reponses from literary and feminist critics to the problematic triad of women, radical religion and insanity have been cognizant of the disabling effects of the 'mad' label upon seventeenth-century women subjects. While state and ecclesiastical authorities often represented women prophets and ecstatics as mad, recognising that this was an effective tactic in political suppression, undeniably some modern commentators have been guilty of similar tactics which negate the significance of the woman prophet and exclude her from another public space, namely the literary. What early modern people meant when they spoke of 'madness' patently does not hold the same associations that the term has for us in the late twentieth century. Just as a psychiatrist's understanding of what 'madness' is differs radically from that of the lay person, it cannot be assumed that members of different sections of early modern society

mean the same thing when they define an individual as 'mad'. In her biography of the aristocratic prophet Eleanor Davies, Esther S. Cope has argued that, given the paucity of historical evidence, it is inappropriate to regard Davies as clinically 'mad.' What madness some of her contemporaries attributed to her should be understood as strategies of retaliatory displacement, a response to her acts of political, social and sexual deviance. Cope observes: "Writing about madness in the seventeenth century is challenging in itself. Men, and especially women, who violated social conventions and expressed political or religious dissent might be called mad. Lady Eleanor was mad by these standards."[29] Similarly, Roy Porter has remarked that not only is the issue of whether Davies was mad or not almost impossible for the historian to answer, but "not even, thus posed, a very interesting question." As he points out, what is compelling is *how* the label of madness is deployed against Davies, and what kinds of institutional ideologies are revealed.[30]

Nevertheless, many critics *do* appear intrigued by this issue, and discussions of Davies and other 'radical' women almost inevitably speak of "a hysterical temperament," eccentricity or mania.[31] The important point is that while early modern labels of madness differ in significant respects from our own, the stigmatizing effect is the same. Alfred Cohen defends his theory that seventeenth-century women prophets and ecstatics were fraudulent and mentally unstable by claiming to limit what he means by madness to 'literary' rather than 'clinical' contexts. He insists: "I certainly pretend to no special competency in this rather slippery field [of 'clinical psychology'?] and only wish to suggest that the behaviour patterns we have been studying are not just a bit odd, but that they are--well, mad."[32]

But it is unconvincing to claim that madness could be appended with

a prefix (like 'literary') that would somehow make it more acceptable, and less pejorative. What is idiomatic of the mad label is the way it is experienced: as profoundly disempowering and marginalising. The subject is either dismissed or sentimentalized. Either way, she ceases to be interesting. After she desecrated the Laudian finery of Litchfield cathedral, the state authorities punished Eleanor Davies by committing her to Bethlehem Hospital in 1637. They could have imprisoned her, as they did in 1633 when she was found guilty of illegally printing her books in Holland, but they seemingly believed that imprisoning Davies risked turning her into a martyr. Far better to concentrate on the bizarre nature of daubing a cathedral with tar, which only a complete lunatic (certainly not a Compleat Woman) could have done. Davies herself referred to her stay in "*Bedlams* loathsome *Prison*," suggesting that she was acutely aware of the stigma of being confined to the asylum, although, as an upper-class woman, she occupied separate (and presumably superior) quarters to the other inmates.[33] In a sense, the fact that she was segregated inside the asylum did not matter. To inhabit the space of the mad was to *be* mad.

The authorities therefore transformed Davies's symbolic attack on the Laudian church into a meaningless act, intelligible only as the behaviour of a mad woman. The literary or historical critic who regards Davies as mad is not motivated to do so by reasons of national security, or by any other justification which state institutions use to legitimise their actions. But in both cases, Davies is depoliticised, silenced, dismissed. Being mad, nothing remains to be said about her. The critic who pathologizes Davies is analogous to seventeenth-century contemporaries who exploited similar strategies to suppress her. If he or she were successful, critical and

historical interest in Davies and other prophetic women perceived as 'mad' would dry up.

We might speculate as to why some historians and literary critics have arrived at similar conclusions to the seventeenth-century opponents of women like Eleanor Davies, Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel. Recent research has focused on the issue of prophetic language in relation to authorship and gender. Megan Matchinske has argued that the critical response to Davies's writing has been to 'shut down' its ambiguities, ironies and 'thickness' (as opposed a 'thinner' text that would be easier to explicate) by claiming it is the work of a mentally unstable imagination. She writes:

> to affix to Davies's texts any such arbitrary label is itself evidence of their successful erasure via the newly emerging (masculinist) subjectivity they attempt to defy. Calling on a single and convenient blanket statement to explain away the complexities of Davies's style necessarily neglects the myriad influences directing her composing process.[34]

Matchinske links the way that Davies's texts are read as symptomatic of their author's mentality, with a reluctance to engage with the difficulty and density of prophetic texts in general. The genre of prophetic apocalyptic was enormously influential in the seventeenth century, particularly during the Civil Wars. John, the author of Revelation, wrote the text during a period of extreme persecution for the early Christians, and it is not surprising that the revelatory literature of apocalyptic prophecy should become preeminent during civil unrest or hardship.

An analysis of any seventeenth-century religious pamphlet will

demonstrate a particular concern with the books of Daniel and Revelation. But these two were by no means the only biblical texts which were being 'decoded' in the context of contemporary events. Also involved in apocalyptic interpretation were the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as many passages in the New Testament in which the Old Testament promises of God were fulfilled.

Prophecy, particularly apocalyptic prophecy, has historically been regarded as creating particular difficulties for the reader. The theologian Richard Bauckham acknowledges the difficulties modern readers have with Revelation. They regard it as an "anomaly" amongst the rest of the New Testament. Simply put, readers "do not know how to read it."[35] Writers were conscious of this problem in the seventeenth century too, but for them persuading readers of the importance of Revelation at a time when its prophecies were obviously imminent was a matter of urgency. In her tract *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* (1653), Mary Cary, who saw herself as a scriptural commentator, attempts to explicate the meaning of the three witnesses in Revelation. She argues that precisely because Revelation is difficult, the incentives for the committed reader who studies it are so much greater:

> Therefore let none be discouraged from reading those things that are written in this book, because they are so hard to be understood, and are more dark and mysterious than most places of Scripture...the Holy Ghost pronounces a particular blessing...which is a special blessing to incite us to the reading of it.[36]

Matchinske's point that numerous critics have found it easier to avoid seventeenth-century women's prophetic writing than attempt to read it on its own, multiple terms suggests that we in the twentieth century have a different idea of what a 'culture of reading practice' constitutes. Perhaps we do not regard early modern religious tracts and pamphlets as 'literature,' so they do not 'qualify' for our investment as conscientious and dedicated readers. But it also reveals assumptions about the the female author and her 'not good enough' text. Megan Matchinske has argued that the woman prophet's perceived 'failure' as a writer and exclusion from the literary sphere criticises her for her inability to write from a position of ungendered, masculine subjectivity. The impossibility of this sabotages her attempt to construct a radical feminine subjectivity even as it is produced in the act of writing.[37]

Christine Berg and Philippa Berry have argued that prophetic utterance is intrinsically 'feminine.' Because the prophetic voice is ambiguous and evasive about the location of subjectivity in relation to the speaker who is either ambiguously the 'author' or not at all, it threatens to disrupt the integrity of early modern patriarchy's modes of (self) representation and articulacy.

As Berg and Berry point out, prophecy refuses "satisfactorily to be assimilated into a fixed symbolic order."[38] They advocate a historicist approach to the study of seventeenth-century female prophecy, treating it as a potentially subversive linguistic medium. They suggest that the polymorphous nature of prophetic utterance which readers find so challenging is the precise quality which disturbed those who recognized that prophecy could operate as a vehicle for the contesting of established religious, social and gender structures. Prophecy avoids subjection to the disciplining

and socializing processes which regulate non-prophetic speech. Reading the prophetic text in the light of the social structures which are constitutive of it enables the reader to understand the text's density not as mere obliqueness, but as the strategic and powerful 'enfolding' of meaning.

A second approach to prophetic language vigorously challenges 'psychologizing' approaches to sectarian and prophetic speech. Clement Hawes's recent monograph *Mania and Literary Style. The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* argues that the 'mania' of certain nonconformist texts needs to be understood not as exposing the psychotic reality of the author, but as a rhetorical strategy designed to unnerve the reader and get the author's message across. Hawes is aware that his adoption of the term 'mania' could be seen as problematic:

> It might be argued that I have, in referring to "manic" rhetoric, so prejudiced the status of such rhetoric as to thwart its projected rehabilitation. The term "manic" would indeed seem to suggest off-putting incomprehensibility. Moreover, any linkage of religious nonconformity and madness would seem to echo the fierce attacks on enthusiasm by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pamphleteers such as Henry More, Joseph Glanvill, Henry Hallywell, and Jonathan Swift. My point in retaining the term, however, is precisely to remember--and thus work through--the profound implication of "mania" in the ideological conflicts of English religious history...I am convinced...that the best way to go beyond "mania" is not to ignore the term but, rather, to use it differently.[39]

Hawes's argument is predicated on the notion that mania should not be understood solely as a psychiatric construct or pejorative label, but as a chosen and meaningful mode of expression utilized by historical actors. He is critical of the reductive approaches which relegate manic speakers to utter unintelligibility, but argues that debating the issue of madness and radical religiosity need not necessarily ellide the agency of historical subjects. Rather, their mania needs to be located within seventeenth-century political, religious and sexual ideologies which are constitutive of it.

Hawes's point that we should confront rather than evade the relation of madness to religious dissent is very persuasive. The reluctance to consider madness as an issue in discussions of seventeenth-century radical religious women is produced in part by our awareness of historical distance. Michael MacDonald has alerted historians to the major differences between early modern and modern concepts of madness, and that as a result neo-Marxist and feminist theories may be inappropriate. He argues that the term was generally used "to discredit troublesome individuals" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[40]

However, the fact that our discussions of madness are limited to condemning its use as a tool of repression suggests that we are inhibited from speaking about madness in more affirmative terms. Perhaps we are anxious about the degree of harm we risk by attributing the label of madness to any historical personage, especially a woman. As Clement Hawes suggests, historians and literary critics who steer clear of madness may do so because they have read 'case history' accounts which pathologize their female subjects. Retrospective diagnosis is represented as an inappropriate activity, compromising the interests of ethical historical study.

It is probable that since feminist academics working in the field of seventeenth-century religious women are agitating for their texts to be made more accessible and no longer read only by specialists, they might regard any confirmation of 'madness' as detrimental to their attempts to recuperate such women from the 'religious pamphlet' ghetto in which they have previously existed. As Hilary Hinds has noted in her study of seventeenth-century sectarian women, the narrowness of the literary canon has denied the significance of the corpus of religious pamphlets, selecting certain poetry and drama by such writers as Shakespeare, Donne and Milton as constituting seventeenth-century 'literature.' Recently, the authority of the canon has been questioned and disrupted. The distinctions between literature and politics have become increasingly blurred, with, for example, Shakespeare's awareness of political issues being 'read back' into interpretations of his plays. Early modern religious writing has been reclaimed by critics working on gender issues, but these texts are also hugely significant for our knowledge of seventeenth-century language, politics and culture. No more than religion, literature cannot be isolated from other cultural discourses in the seventeenth century.[41]

It is difficult for feminist critics to resist the temptation of looking for feminist antecedents in the early modern period. This is probably what attracted them to the field in the first place. But this should not mean that we concentrate upon the abuses of the label of madness and ignore the ways in which it is appropriated and exploited. It is necessary to reformulate our definitions of madness in order to recognize that it could operate in a productive as well as a discriminatory sense. My point is to argue that the relationship between women, radical religiosity and madness may be contentious,

but that does not mean it cannot be discussed. Identifying the pitfalls of previous 'psychologizing' approaches should not preclude our development of others which do take into account women's subjectivity. It needs to be understood within the cultural context of the seventeenth century, but it should not be assumed that radical religious women were always the victims and never the exploiters of 'mad' stereotypes.

This section has constituted a brief induction to some of the theorisations of women's participation in radical religion and prophecy and suggested some of the implications for the researcher's critical approach. I shall now consider a number of approaches to the subject of radical religion in relation to social and cultural processes.

The Politics of Visibility: Women, Sects and Society

The classical sociology of religion positions itself in relation to the basic questions about the place of religion in relation to other social structures and the function it performs in society. Approaches to these questions can be schematized in one of two ways: either religion is an 'opiate,' as Karl Marx put it, or part of the ideological state apparatus, in Louis Althusser's formulation; or it legitimately regulates and orders society, no illusory construct but a 'social fact' by virtue of its prevalence throughout history, as Emile Durkheim asserted.[42]

Theories of radical religiosity calculate degrees of difference between sects and cults and established forms of religion. They test upon sects hypotheses drawn from observing mainstream religion, to discover whether the sect functions in a similar way. It is a

commonplace fact that sects are frequently regarded as oppositional and even threatening to the established church. What impact does the sect have on the church and on other social institutions? Does the sect subvert the 'opiate' character of mainstream religion, and therefore become figured as chaotic and 'radical'? In what ways might the sect be analogous to established religion? If it survives beyond a brief moment of radicalism, is it inevitable that the sect will develop the features of denominational religions? What social needs does the sect serve? On a more fundamental level, does our understanding of the interrelations of the putative categories of church and sect problematize the construction of religion as either repressive or cohesive?

The theory that sects and cults behave counter to established religion and generate radical and liberating possibilities for their members contends that minority and disprivileged social groups constitute a significant number of their membership. Women are included among this putative stratum, a point which is reinforced by the notion that women are especially active in sectarian religious groups--suggesting that sects fulfil some need for women which is not provided elsewhere. However, this commonplace idea begins to look less compelling when placed beside another that suggests women's participation in all forms of religion is significantly high. This begs the question of what it is that religion in general offers women.

Whether or not religious sects can be said to 'liberate' women depends not just on the sect's hierarchical structure and the internal opportunities for women it provides, but on its ability to influence how the wider community is organised and agitate for change. If it is argued that one of the distinctive features of the

sect is the elevation of woman's role into positions of authority and power, does this constitute a radical re-evaluation of women's social, economic and political role? Can women be said to become more 'visible' within cultural discourses as a result of participating in sectarian religion? Gail Malmgreen notes that the question of what women achieve through their transactions with religion continues to dominate the work of feminist/womanist historians of religion:

> Perhaps the most important task confronting the historian of women's spirituality is to keep alive the central paradox, the complex tension between religion as an 'opiate' and as an embodiment of ideological and institutional sexism, and religion as transcendent and liberating force. It is surely neither possible nor necessary to weigh up, once and for all, the gains and losses for women of religious commitment. What is clear is that the dealings of organised religion with women have been richly laced with ironies and contradictions.[43]

As Malmgreen suggests, properly understood, religion is not merely an agent of women's repression, or the facilitator of their emancipation and liberation. An enquiry into formations of religious radicalism within society must establish precisely what this 'radicalism' constitutes, and the implications it has for women's cultural visibility.

Max Weber's *The Sociology of Religion* considers the relation between gender, religious participation and social structure. It includes a chapter entitled the 'Religion of Non-Privileged Classes.' Weber accounts for gender differentials in participation in sects and cults by distinguishing between militarization or

pacification as the focus of a specific sect's interests. He notes that "the religion of the disprivileged classes...is characterized by a tendency to allot equality to women," but the "great diversity in the scope of the religious participation" is conditional on whether the sect is military or pacifist in type. Sects which encourage the active participation of women are therefore pacifist, while the military, political and revolutionary-type of sect has little interest in recruiting women, concentrating instead on cultivating military strength among its male 'soldiers.' Weber argues that women demonstrate a "greater receptivity" to all religious prophecy, except those forms which are "exclusively military or political in orientation."

He disputes the degree of actual power women in sects possess, arguing that although the presence of 'exceptional' women may be sanctioned, scant authority is conferred upon them:

> the presence of priestesses, the prestige of female soothsayers or witches, and the most extreme devotion of individual women, to whom supernatural powers and charisma may be attributed, does not by any means imply that women have equal privileges in the cult.

Not only are women denied positions of authority and power within the sect's hierarchy, but the acceptance and promotion of female ecstasy or mystical behaviour, memorably referred to by Weber as "pneumatic manifestations," is restricted to the early stages of the sect's existence. If the sect survives, it will need to accommodate the "routinization and regimentation of community relationships," and eventually it will regard the prominence of ecstatic women as

"dishonourable and morbid."[44]

Conscious perhaps that readers might infer that Weber regarded women as essential to the formation of a sect, he argues the contrary. Speaking of the Indian religion of *ahimsa*, Weber remarks that: "The influence of women only tended to intensify those aspects of the religion that were *emotional or hysterical*" [italics my emphasis].[45] Weber understands the role of women within sects as essentially expendable, useful during periods when the intention of the sect is to appear 'emotional,' but rejected once survival is dependent upon rational organisation.

Weber asserts that female participation is limited, both by the rationale of the sect and its awareness of the need for expediency if it is to perpetuate itself. Weber claims that women's spirituality is apolitical and non-military: above all 'emotional.' The revolutionary, politically-conscious sects and cults are figured as exclusively male. Despite linking membership of sects and cults as a response to the experience of 'non-privilege,' Weber closes off the possibility that women too might have revolutionary aspirations, perpetuating the domestication of women's religiosity. Women are among the disprivileged, but their femininity denies them access to the military collective, which is the only truly radical group Weber is able to envisage, legitimizing women's exclusion from politics.

A theory based upon binary opposites is also evident in Weber's construction of the two types of asceticism. These are "world-rejecting" (*weltablehnende Askese*) and "inner-worldly" (*inner-weltiche Askese*). The first entails a hermetic withdrawal or "Flight" from the world; in the second, the mystic participates "within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them" and

may actively work to transform the world.[46]

Weber's identification of the two types as mutually exclusive is problematic. Caroline Walker Bynum has applied his theories to medieval women mystics, and argues that their piety does not conform to either one model. Instead, it "unites action and contemplation," consisting of both world-retiring and world-transforming elements.[47] Weber's concepts tend to make the relationship between gender and religious practice appear far simpler than it really is, since he employs very rigid categories which become problematic once they are tested. This is not to say, however, that there is no value to his ideas, or to deny their influence. Weber's contention that the sect must institute the complex hierarchical and power structures it eschewed during its embryonic stages if it is to survive is suggestive of the role of the sect in religious and social change. One pre-Weberian example of the sociological explanations for religious change is Ernst Troeltsch's church-sect typology in his classic work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1931).[48] Quakerism and Methodism are often cited as examples of the evolution of the sect into a denominational church. The question of religious change and its relation to social structure has generated much sociological debate. One example I want to consider is the anthropologist Victor Turner's book, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969).

Turner's explanation of religious change is is dependent upon the notion that 'society' constitutes a movement between two conditions or, as Turner puts it, models for human "relatedness:" structure and communitas. He comments:

> The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and

often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less". The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals.[49]

Liminality, meaning 'threshold,' refers to a condition or people which occupy marginal and ambiguous interstices within cultural space. Turner suggests that liminality is one of the manifestations of communitas. Central to Turner's thesis is the notion that society is structured to accommodate change. Concerning religion, he remarks: "Transition has here become a permanent condition."[50] Turner identifies the radical millenarian movements as among "the most striking manifestations of communitas."[51] The features of these sects, including the abolition of private property in favour of communal ownership, equality, humility and negating distinctions of rank and status, are typical of the sense of plenitude and opportunity which communitas creates. But communitas, existing in the absence of structure, is both 'spontaneous' and transient:

> Communitas, or the "open society," differs...from structure, or the "closed society," in that it is potentially or ideally extensible to the limits of humanity. In practice, of course, the impetus soon becomes exhausted, and the "movement" becomes itself an institution among other institutions...Mostly, such movements occur during phases of history that are in many respects "homologous" to the liminal periods of important

> rituals in stable and repetitive societies, when major groups or social categories are passing from one cultural state to another. They are essentially phenomena of transition.[52]

Communitas movements, Turner suggests, are exciting and dynamic, 'opening up' possibilities which the 'closed society,' with its institutional complexity, does not permit. But they are short-lived: their "fate" is to "undergo...a 'decline and fall' into structure and law."[53] This might mean that they disappear, or that they come to resemble other social institutions. Turner does not regard structure as an inhibiting or repressive condition, asserting that its order provides a sense of security for members of a community. He suggests that individuals "need" to experience both states. Society is "a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and communitas," in which the prominence of sects and cults regenerates society and once it has fulfilled this function it is displaced by the resurgence of structure.[54]

Turner's theory implies that the effect of sectarian movements on the lives of women is likely to be emotionally invigorating and personally satisfying, but does not constitute any long-term improvement in their social and political visibility. The cycle of communitas and structure is designed to relieve pressures and frustrations, with communitas acting as a 'safety valve' mechanism, with those who participate in it (including women) as the conscripts, but there is little progress towards social change. The existing social order perpetuates itself. If communitas corresponds to the feminine, its only legitimate role is to reinforce the authority of 'masculine' structure, which Turner represents *as* society, creating relations which bind individuals together. Turner privileges

structure because it is the 'natural' order of patriarchal societies, which he accepts without question.

Analyses such as Turner and Weber, which only conceive of sectarian movements as serving the interests of a self-perpetuating social order, take little account of what the religious practices mean to the participants. An emphasis on the 'macro' level of social structure ellides the significance of the 'micro.' The anthropologist Mary Douglas seeks to rectify this imbalance in her discussion of ritualism and anti-ritualism in her book *Natural Symbols*. Many approaches to anti-ritualism, she argues, treat it as the protest of the disinherited against rigid and stulfifying forms of social organisation. Such people value internal and intuitive expressions of religiosity. Over time, the sect gradually becomes less preoccupied with the needs of the poor, and experiences upward social mobility. Ritualism eventually becomes entrenched in the religious practices of the sect:

> One of the most usual explanations of the regular renewal of anti-ritualism is that revolts against established hierarchical systems of religion come from the disinherited. A popular combination of Freud and Weber, it assumes that the principal religious function is to cope with psychological maladjustment and that as this function becomes more or less established, so the social forms become more or less routinized. A movement which begins as a sect expressing the religious needs of the poor gradually moves up the social scale. It becomes respectable. Its rituals increase, its rigorous fundamentalism in devotion to the Word becomes as weighted with magic as the sacramental edifice it started by denying. With

respectability comes ritualism.

Douglas disputes this explanation, pointing out that anti-ritualism is not necessarily the religion of choice among under-privileged groups. She identifies cases where dispossessed groups, such as the Bog Irish, retain elaborate rituals in spite of the assumption that anti-ritualism corresponds to the lower social stratum.[55] Douglas suggests that religious expression constitutes "the symbolic replication of a social state," in other words, marginalised groups choose symbolic forms which reflect their experiences.

Douglas also rejects those explanations of sectarian membership which cite economic or social deprivation, problematizing Weber's theory which locates women within the underprivileged stratum. Such an account does not explain why women of a high social class join sectarian movements. Psychological accounts, which claim that such women are emotionally frustrated, are too "glib," as Douglas puts it.[56] She notes that the sexual division of labour restricts women to the domestic sphere, so that they have little contact with political and social institutions. Douglas maintains that it is impossible to interpret social process unless it is related to cosmology. Her approach avoids the patronising, disempowering or pathologizing results of criticism which maintains that sectarian partipation signifies an abnormal mental state or 'underclass' mentality.

The question of why women were so prominent in seventeenth-century sects cannot be satisfactorily answered by theories of the cyclical nature of social order. As I have demonstrated, these close down the revolutionary possibilities of sectarian religious behaviour by subjugating it to the service of the social entity. The significance

of the sect itself is annexed, which rebounds upon its members. Such theories also represent women in negative terms, inferring that the putatively feminine, hysterical and emotional elements are damaging to the sect and something it must repress if it is to survive. A rejection of this approach is Mary Douglas's promotion of positive feminine symbols.

Not all critics have agreed that radical religious practices like prophecy periodically come to prominence and are then shut down. Elmer O`Brien in *Varieties of Mystic Experience* (1965) rejects the notion of variable levels of mystics and ecstatics at different historical moments, arguing rather that mysticism is continuously present. When mystical activity appears to rise exponentially in a society, this is as a result of the increased attention paid to it, which means it becomes more visible.[57] Similarly, Thomas W. Overholt remarks that:

> To say that in a given social context prophecy came to an end is not to deny the theoretical possibility of valid prophetic activity but rather to note the failure of members of that society, at least for the moment, to credit (authorize) specific instances of prophetic behaviour.[58]

O` Brien and Overholt suggest that the religious behaviour frequently associated with sectarian movements is ever-present, but remains for the most part 'unseen` because its practitioners are marginalised as occult or bizarre. This theory argues that the process by which prophetic and ecstatic behaviour becomes visible is one of appropriation, rather than reading it as a spontaneous phenomena produced by specific historical and cultural conditions.

This appends the commonplace assumption that there was a Civil War explosion in prophetic activity and a disproportionate number of 'inspired' women, into a question of what ideological currents were active to liberate prophecy from the margins into popular culture. What led people to take it seriously when they previously had not?

It would appear that accounting for women's participation in radical religious movements entails an analysis at the 'micro' level of social action. R.A. Knox has famously remarked that: "The history of enthusiasm is largely a history of female emancipation," and we know that, symbolically, prophecy was a 'feminine' construct, despite the existence of both male and female prophets.[59] But symbols and historical commonplaces cannot accurately reflect ordinary women's experience of seventeenth-century religious sects. Keith Thomas has noted that the sects placed emphasis upon the spiritual equality of the sexes.[60] An anonymous woman writing in defence of her sex argues against the notion that only men are "fitting for Heaven" and women "irreversibly damn'd," asserting that: "Heaven is for all those whose Purity and Obedience to its Law, qualifies them for it, whether Male or Female."[61]

The protestant emphasis upon the family as the centre of religious piety went some way towards rehabilitating woman in terms of her importance within the household, although admittedly more emphasis was placed on the husband's authority. His wife remained submissive to him. As Diane Willen points out, "The Reformation had removed the parish priest and elevated in his stead the male head of the household who was responsible for the oversight of religious observance."[62] In his eulogy to the Lady Letice, Viscountess of Falkland, published in 1648, John Duncan addresses an "elegie" to women. Part of it reads:

"And now, though *Paul* forbids her Sex to *Preach*,/Yet may her *Life instruct*, and her *Death teach*,/For *good Works* ne're were silenced."[63] The godly woman was a role model whose life exemplified piety, humility, "good works" and housewifely dedication.

Many historians have demonstrated that women of all social classes made important contributions to religion in the community, including patronage and protection of ministers, providing hospitality, doing charitable work, being involved in decision-making, and providing religious instruction for children and servants.[64] This work was increasingly vital in the non-conformist churches, after they were forced to conduct their operations in a more covert manner with the resurgence of state persecution. The importance of the household in ensuring the survival of the faith grew with the late seventeenth-century prohibition against conventicles. Legislation was drafted in during 1664 and 1670 to make non-conformist public meetings of more than a maximum number of people illegal.

Consequently, Keith Thomas's assertion that: "we should remember too the importance of women in religious bodies which were not sects...It is possible indeed to hold for the seventeenth century a theory of the greater natural religiosity of women" reminds us of the relative minority status of women preachers, prophets and ecstatics, in comparison to the type of godly work most protestant and sectarian women were involved with.[65] While protestantism was prepared to accept spiritual equality, at least in theory, the sects extended and implemented this principle in their organisation and religious observance. Some of them permitted women to preach and prophesy--providing they were filled with the Spirit--just as men did. Those women who were not the recipients of spiritual gifts like extempore speech and ecstasy became involved in co-ordinating meetings and

other essential arrangements.

Both the sects and their opponents exploited the 'female element,' which on the one hand constituted a powerful example of how God could make use of humble vessels and confound the arrogance of human presumption, and on the other, be used to taunt and deprecate the sect for having so many 'silly women' among its membership. The Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel argues that God alone is the author(izer) of her prophecies: "Oh Lord, thy servant knows there is no selfe in this thing."[66] An example of antifeminist attack on sectarian religion is the anonymous *A Discoverie of Six women preachers* (1641). Its author concludes:

> Thus have I declared some of the female Academyes, but where their Vniversity is I cannot tell, but I suppose that Bedlam or Bridewell would be two convenient places for them, is it not sufficient that they may have the Gospell truly and sincerely Preached unto them, but that they must take their Ministers office from them?[67]

Even the most 'radical' sects, like the Diggers and Levellers, with their ambitious plans to benefit ordinary working people, such as the redistribution of wealth and the abolition of tithes, did not have what could be described as proto-feminist agendas. They provided women with enhanced opportunities, and the possibility of community influence beyond the family, but they did not attempt to eradicate gender inequalities. When women acted as a collective, notably by petitioning parliament for peace during the civil wars (such occurrences were inevitably hysterically misrepresented as evidence of the 'parliament of women'), they did so from the positions of

housewife and mother, not as empowered revolutionaries. Indirectly of course, the sects encouraged women to participate beyond their domestic roles of nurturing and housework, but not even they were necessarily comfortable with women preaching, prophesying and publishing. Many sects categorized under the rubric of 'radicalism' possessed a more moderate mentality.[68] David Underdown has noted that there was little historical basis for the conservative assumption that women militants were responsible for ushering in revolutionary disorder.[69]

The principle of spiritual equality remained just that: at worst, a theological construct without practical application, at best, strictly limited to the religious sphere. Precisely what equality before God constituted was perpetually a matter for debate, with theologians and other commentators never far from the issue of Eve's legacy. Calvin maintained that women were subject to men even before the fall. He termed the prelapsarian state of gender relations "a liberal and gentle subjection." Once mankind was in a state of sin, the sense of liberality was replaced by harsher treatment for guilty Eve: "Let the woman be satisfied with her state of subjection, and not take it amiss that she is made inferior to the more distinguished sex."[70] The anonymous tract *A Question Deeply concerning Married Persons* (1653) is representative of the post-Calvinist theological acquittal of Adam and condemnation of Eve: "For what saith the Scripture? *Adam* was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression...[she] became the devils Proctor, and prevailed with *Adam* to be in the same transgression with her."[71] When seventeenth-century women writers like Margaret Fell Fox and Mary Astell argued for the expansion of women's educational and social opportunities, they first had to rehabilitate Eve's negative

image: they acknowledged the position of women within religious discourse as the single most important obstacle to women's equality of opportunity.

Theories of social processes and histories of female emancipation may have little interest in seventeenth-century women prophets and ecstatics, claiming they are insignificant and ultimately achieved little. But it seems paradoxical to assume, on the one hand, that there was an exponential rise in women's participation in organised religion in the seventeenth century, including non-conformist and separatist groups, and on the other, to dismiss this activity as minor and of no long-term consequence.

A trans-historical construct of society as static, monolithic and above all patriarchal is evident in those theories which measure the 'value' of women prophets as historically and culturally trivial, brief 'flares' of phenomenological activity which eventually disappear. To quantify these women within the totality of world history diminishes the discursive space they take up and ignores the effects of their radical religiosity within early modern culture. If, as I have suggested, relating radical and sectarian religious movements to the social structure is ultimately reductive, how should we approach the subject of women prophets?

"An admirable vacuity of all desire of knowing": Gender, Prophecy and Agency

Fundamentally, prophecy should be understood as problematic. It should not necessarily be assumed that the sects in which it frequently occurred promoted it, especially among women. It appears that for a minority of women, most but not all of whom were members of

sects such as the Quakers or Fifth Monarchists, certain expressions of religiosity, notably prophecy and ecstasy, were transformed from being expressions of group values, and became increasingly individuated.

The sect, particularly if it espoused more moderate values, might not actively encourage women's preaching and prophecy. But as a form of organised religion, it exemplified the principle of the individual's right to seek and express their spirituality freely. This could be achieved through experiential modes of religiosity. In Nigel Smith's formulation, the radical sectaries' promotion of prophecy and ecstasy over more 'intellectual,' less spontaneous forms constituted a shift "from knowledge to power."[72] In other words, the sect provided an environment which was sympathetic to extempore and ecstatic religious behaviour, even if its tacit acknowledgement of women's cultural inferiority meant it would not actually sanction women as figures of divine authority.

Historians have commented upon the wider 'problem' of religious individualism, a factor in the development of English non-conformity which, in the second half of the seventeenth century, was perceived as an undesirable and intolerable side-effect. After 1660, it was refuted even by more radical protestants who believed it was right to compromise in favour of the social order.[73] Prophecy needs to be understood within the context of a culture which becomes progressively anxious about religious individualism. As both linguistic mode and performative spirituality, prophecy is generative of debate about the authorization and control of meaning.

The twentieth-century definition of prophecy is far less complex than it was in the early modern period. Then, prophecy signified not

only divinatory power, specifically supernaturally-derived messages which presaged a future event, but could refer to a variety of 'contacts' between the divine and human agents. These included scriptural explication, preaching and prophetic speech. Mary Cary, briefly mentioned above, does not claim to be a prophet, but attributes her ability to decode the numerical symbolism of Revelation to divine providence. Therefore, 'classical' prophecy and divinely-inspired scriptural exegesis occupy privileged space within the entirety of religious experience. However, gendered constructs of pious femininity dictate that Cary must, on the basis of her inferiority, differentiate between the knowledge God has revealed to her and the 'authorized' prophets of the Old Testament.

When the prophet utters the word of God, she enacts (or is compelled to enact) the role of the theolept, who is "seized upon and smitten with [God's] galvanizing fire."[74] The prophetic body is ambivalently positioned on a continuum between enforced and voluntary passivity. Is this a weak, insensible body, as the occlusion of subjectivity necessary for the presence of the *logos* would appear to suggest, or is it instead a willing, compliant body? Prophecy radically disrupts the assumed link between the speaker and language, which does not originate in the prophet, but is transmitted *through* her.

In the Old Testament Book of Jonah, prophecy is problematized as an act of ventriloquism, which is strenuously resisted by its eponymous reluctant prophet. In the narrative, God's pursuit of Jonah is set against Jonah's equal determination to escape. For him, the belly of the whale is an infinitely more desirable place to be than Ninevah, where God has ordered him to go and prophesy to the people.

Jonah's 'resistance,' however, is not silence, as one might assume

the ultimate disobedience of God's command to be. While he is in the whale, Jonah sings a psalm praising God's compassion. The irony of this lies in Jonah's explicit detachment from the text he utters. Jonah does not desire intimacy with God and is not consoled by the psalm, since the God who gives him orders is experienced as tyrannous.

Jonah's psalm-singing constitutes an effective subversion of the prophetic role, substituting an outrageously self-conscious 'performance' for the stereotype of the transfigured, ecstatic and receptive prophetic body. Jonah suggests that the prophet is inevitably detached from his text, since the words are not his and are elicited under duress. There are literally *no other words* available to Jonah to express his relationship with God, other than those idiomatic to prophecy or consolation. Jonah, of course, is vomited from the whale back into the world from which he tried so hard to escape, which would seem to prove his point about the coercive realities behind the 'privileged' role of the prophet.

The reader will have noticed that, prior to discussing Jonah, I used the female pronoun when referring to the prophet. This is not only because women prophets are the subject of this enquiry, but also to emphasize the specific obstacles a woman faces in her attempt to be credited as a prophet. I want to suggest that there is something particularly threatening about the proximity between femininity and the masculine *logos* which prophecy creates. While prophecy could emphasize the humility and passivity of the "hand-maiden," emptied out of self and sexuality, it also raised the disturbing possibility of women's generative autonomy, in which they were able to (re)produce subjectivities and texts in ways which rendered patriarchal or paternal imput and control redundant.

When Anna Trapnel's prophetic outpourings were recorded and published by her (presumably male) auditors, considerable emphasis was placed upon her status as an 'empty' vessel. Trapnel prophesies while in a fugue or trance state, and her editors describe her appearance and behaviour during this state in a way that deliberately effaces the identity of the 'conscious' Trapnel, who has been displaced by God's presence. In *The Cry of a Stone* (1654), the text asserts:

> the effects of a spirit caught up in the Visions of God, did abundantly appear in the fixedness and immoveableness of her speech in prayer, but more especially in her songs: notwithstanding the distractions among the people occasioned by rude spirits, that unawares crept in, which was observed by many who heard her, who seemed to us to be as one whose ears and eyes were locked up, that all was to her as a perfect silence.[75]

Phyllis Mack, noting how the woman prophet needed to convince her audience that 'her' speech came from God and was not her own, comments that: "Many women would surely have had to reach a state of near-catatonia or hysteria in order to overcome their own diffidence and the doubts of others."[76] Mack interprets the 'dissociative' characteristics of prophecy and ecstasy functioning not simply as evidence which confirms the prophet's authenticity, but as facilitating women's 'release' into a position of maximum visibility which they would consciously experience as humiliating and even degrading. However, it should be noted that ecstatic or dissociative behaviour is by no means universal among seventeenth-century women

prophets.

Whether seventeenth-century women prophets *did* feel that their 'calling' compromised their public and private identities is difficult to ascertain. It was common for women to describe how they were initially resistant to God's plans for them, as when Anna Trapnel learns she must leave Stepney and travel to Cornwall. Both her sister and members of her church try to persuade her not to go, fearing for her safety, but God succeeds in convincing her. However, she continues to suffer episodes of despair and self-doubt, and the worst of these occurs when Trapnel is walking alone in a field, and encounters the devil.

Her voice suddenly weakens: "I could not well speak, but softly: and I was greatly tempted...that I should be hoarse while I lived." Her apprehension about Cornwall creates her desire for anonymity and silence. Satan warns her that her "*extraordinary dispensation of prayer and singing*" will fail her if she travels to the south-west, suggesting that without it, Trapnel will appear pathetic to the crowds gathered to hear her: "*for they look at that, and not at thee; and that departing from thee, thou wilt not be regarded by them.*"[77]

Satan may be exploiting her 'natural' feminine reticence to put herself into the public gaze by telling her that, as a mere woman stripped of her prophetic abilities, she will not be aided by the kind of "catatonic" insensibility Mack describes. Or he may be criticizing her arrogance, her desire to be looked upon and celebrated as a prophet. It is difficult to tell which, because we cannot establish whether Trapnel's reluctance is 'real' or evidence that she has internalized the cultural stereotype of privatized femininity.

The representation of the woman prophet, either by self or her

editors and supporters, constitutes an attempt to rid her of the 'troubling' qualities of sexuality, femininity and agency. Her exceptional status as a prophet must be reconciled with ideals of female piety which emphasize self-negation, passivity and an inert role in public life. In his defence of the continental prophet and mystic Antonia Bourignon, printed in 1699, George Garden argued that Bourignon's prophetic writings are superior to the intellectual activities of men: "In her conversations with God she used neither Ideas nor meditations; but was in an admirable vacuity of all desire of knowing either this or that; having no will of her own."[78]

(Spiritual) knowledge is better, Garden claims, when it has not been sought after, when it is miraculously 'communicated' through the body of a woman void of all desire, sexuality and agency. The prestige of this admirable image is produced by the cultural intolerance of the figure of the learned, intellectual woman. Garden's appropriation of the body of the woman prophet corresponds closely to the nineteenth-century concept of passive or automatic writing.[79] This was an 'author' who had no aspirations to write, and no pretensions towards membership of the masculine club of intellectualism, and therefore did not constitute a threat to it. By representing Bourignon as a passive writer, Garden avoids the implications of a woman prophet's status as an author, and what assumptions this might disrupt. He erases any possibility that Bourignon produces the knowledge she 'writes.' There is no danger of female generative power usurping male dominance in the creation of knowledge. Bourignon is merely a channel for a text whose source is a reassuring and absolute masculinity: God.

Even in a text like *The Cry of a Stone*, where there is explicit editorial attempts to 'de-sex'and 'de-self' women's prophecy, it is

clear that prophetic utterance actively resists efforts to close down its production of gendered subjectivity. While Anna Trapnel's ecstasy is by no means typical of seventeenth-century woman prophets, its primacy in representations of her spirituality *is* analogous to early modern accounts of women whose bodies manifested miraculous healings and fasting. Trapnel survived for many days with little or nothing to eat or drink. Attempts to arrest her while she stayed at a house at Tresagow in Cornwall had to be postponed after efforts to revive her from a trance state failed. Her eyes were forced open and her nose pinched, but Trapnel "heard none of all this stir & bussle." She suffered fever and other physical 'illness,' inflicted so "that the power of...God may be made manifest."[80]

The woman whose body constitutes a 'theatre' of divine power could be susceptible to becoming the object rather than author of a text, since her physical debilitation reduces or removes her ability to represent herself through language. In the case of the woman prophet, changes in the strength and tone of her voice substituted for actual silence as evidence of the subjection of her identity. In *Voice For The King Of Saints And Nations* (1658), the transcriber is present as Anna Trapnel prophesies to a public audience. A Quaker group continually interrupts, raising "*impudent objections*" and disputing whether Trapnel is really a prophet. He relates how God "*sent down a louder voice, that did drown this...it had victory over* [the Quakers], *that they were not able to tarry in the room.*"[81] Manifesting bodily expressions of spirituality about which she was inarticulate, the woman prophet or ecstatic was a sign to be deciphered and validated by onlookers. The female position is that of a body which becomes a (masculine) text.

As an index of exemplary passivity and dependency, we might assume

that the ecstatic body would be the object of external scrutiny and analysis. The denial of agency implicit in bodily dissociation would be incongrous with its appropriation by the female subject herself after the event. Yet this is exactly what we have in Anna Trapnel's *Hymn to the Merchants*, one of the spiritual songs reproduced in *The Cry of a Stone*. This hymn attempts to dissuade its mercantile audience from desiring luxury and excess, and being obsessed with trade deals and assets. Instead, they are encouraged to recognize their spiritual poverty. The hymn's persuasiveness relies on the fact that Trapnel's body is rhetorically present in the text, as the point of departure for metaphors of hunger and repletion.

Trapnel represents the merchants as sensualists who glut themselves with "Canded Ginger" and "Preserved Nutmegs." But such pleasures are transient and ephemeral. Trapnel invokes the experience of her inedia in an argument against materialistic values. She depicts the longing of the soul as a form of hunger, and emphasizes how God's sustenance is inexhaustible and eternal. She compares the divine "preserves" to the candies the merchants are so fond of:

> But these preserves continue shall,
> No mouldy skins shall be
> At all of them; But the longer
> You keep them, you shall see.
>
> They are as fresh and lovely as
> They were when first he brought,
> They do not loose their tast at all,
> Oh that you would have sought.

These things indeed as pleasant, all
That you would feed upon
Them which will strengthen you always
And lead you to Mount Sion.[82]

In *A Legacy For Saints*, Trapnel described her experiences of spiritual afflictions, fasting and despair. The 'spiritual autobiography' was both an extremely influential literary form and pious exercise during the seventeenth century, as evinced by famous examples such as John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. But what is remarkable about the *Hymn* is the way Trapnel transposes her experience of inedia into the field of socio-political debate. The text constitutes a shift from the passive to the politicized body. It rejects the privatization of feminine spirituality which enforced women's dependency on male literary agents to package and publish their experiences.

Anna Trapnel's *Hymn* appears in a text where the editorial 'framing' of prophetic utterance is explicitly an attempt to represent her as a passive vessel, God's meek hand-maiden. However, her use of her body as an instrument of political and class rhetoric is at odds with this carefully-cultivated image. Therefore, prophecy has the potential to be excessive to the constraints erected around it, and its political subversiveness is not limited to speech (such as the criticisms levelled at Oliver Cromwell by Anna Trapnel in *Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-Hall* (1654), for which she was imprisoned), but is also apparent in the way the body is mobilized in cultural discourse.

The case of Anna Trapnel is suggestive with regard to the question I

posed at the end of the last section, namely of how we should conceptualize prophecy. As I noted above, some of the most compelling recent studies of seventeenth-century radical religion have focused on prophetic language and its sexual, political and social implications. But I want to suggest that a working definition of prophecy needs to include somatic manifestations as well as speech, so that the seditious nature of women's prophecy is understood as utterance which is predicated on the female body. Prophecy was problematic not only because it was understood as a 'feminine' register (which could of course manifest itself in men) but because the proximity of the female body constituted a palpable, not just metaphorical, threat to the masculine *logos*.

Male prophets, like the Welshman Arise Evans, a Royalist, were not necessarily more successful in being credited as divinely-inspired, but they elicited a different reaction. Evans visited Charles I and the Earl of Essex with his prophecies. The latter was highly amused when Evans informed him he was God's chosen "General," and gave him a gold coin for his trouble, which Evans indignantly refused.[83] On the streets and in the taverns of London, Evans loudly declaimed his prophecies, and most people believe him to be "distracted": babbling and incoherent. At one stage he was confined by his own family, after he prophesied in his home town of Wrexham. They feared for his safety and their reputation.

In London in 1635, Evans was arrested and imprisoned in the Gatehouse at Westminster. It was his belief that the authorities had engineered some sort of plot to ensnare him. In prison, he wrote a letter predicting Charles I's regicide. He seems to have been regarded as a political subversive rather than as insane. In 1637, the King's Secretary Windebank wrote to Evans in prison, asking if

anyone thought he was mad. Evans wrote back answering that some did. "God forbid that I should be of their judgement," Windebank wrote in his next letter, but he said he believed that procuring a "Certificate" alleging Evans's madness would hasten his release.[84]

The narrative indicates that Evans's chaotic presence was taken quite seriously by the authorities once it ceased to be merely amusing and bizarre. Although it can be argued that the practice of labelling a prophet as mad, (an extremely common tactic where women were concerned, as various popular and government sources attest to), is motivated by the same anxieties about political security as imprisonment, the consequences for the individual are evidently *not* the same.

Eleanor Davies's efforts to influence state politics and English protestantism through her writing became risible when she was regarded as insane. Her defiance of her husbands and the King no longer constituted a threat to patriarchal power once Davies was re-evaluated as an eccentric, a shrew and a mad woman. In his biography of William Laud, *Cyprianus Anglicus* (1668), Peter Heylyn notes how, in 1634, Davies prophesied Laud's imminent demise. This led to her appearance before the High Commission, on the charge that her prophecies were of a "mischievous nature." Davies had 'proved' that she was possessed by the spirit of the prophet Daniel with the anagram: "ELEANOR DAVIES, REVEAL O DANIEL." Heylyn says that the court's intention was to "dispossess" Davies of this spirit, but all their reasoning and arguing was to no avail, until Davies's claim was challenged by another anagram:

> *Lamb* then Dean of the *Arches* shot her through and through, with

an Arrow borrowed from her own Quiver: For whilst the Bishops and Divines were reasoning the Point with her out of Holy Scripture, he took a pen into his hand, and at last hit upon this excellent *Anagram*, viz. DAME ELEANOR DAVIES, NEVER SOE MAD A LADIE...*Madam*, said he, *I see you build much on* Anagrams, *and I have found one out which I hope will fit you*; This said, and reading it aloud, he put it into her hands in Writing, which happy Phansie brought that grave Court into such a laughter, and the poor Woman thereupon into such a confusion, that afterwards she grew either wiser, or was less regarded. This ended as successfully as he could desire.[85]

Lamb's tactic is an effective form of propaganda, devastatingly successful in undermining Davies's claim to arcane knowledge and the status of a prophet. Prior to his intervention, the Court had treated Davies as an intellectual problem. They had taken her seriously enough to make a concerted effort to persuade her to abandon her claims. The belief that letters and numbers held special significance and could be arranged into powerful combinations owed itself to the medieval and renaissance occult and cabbalistic traditions, which influenced Christianity to a degree.

The Court did not dismiss the Daniel anagram, not because they themselves may have disbelieved it, but because they recognized the public "regard" Davies could achieve by it. Isolating Davies from the public gaze, they try to demonstrate to her that in relation to scripture, her claim to be a prophet is untenable. Davies, who had benefited from an aristocratic education, did not quite conform to the notion of intellectually-challenged womanhood. Her 'fantasies' were more intractable than the clerics had assumed. When the Court

collapses into laughter, Davies's significance, even only as a 'problem,' is completely eroded. Lamb knows that he has effectively secured the derision of the Court and, consequently, the public, whose interest in her prophesies will gradually dissipate. Heylyn can afford to express his sympathy for this 'poor' and 'confused' woman. He knows the establishment has triumphed on this occasion.

While it is true that we must regard seventeenth-century women prophets as a minority group and therefore as unrepresentative of most women's experiences, the reactions to such women by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities tells us as much about the formal (and informal) norms women were expected to conform to, as they do about what punitive sanctions would be imposed if such limits were exceeded. The degree of notoriety is an index to what level of visibility a woman prophet achieved.

Arise Evans is able to challenge his detractors by giving an account of those officials who credited his prophecies. In 1650, Colonel John Jones asked for a certificate to be shown to the Council of State, proving that Evans's prophesies about Charles I, religion and civil unrest had been fulfilled.[86] While the treatment of Evans suggests that his prophesying was regarded as politically sensitive, the reactions to Eleanor Davies connived to make her invisible by exposing her emotionality, her feminine weakness and imbecility to the public gaze.

By aggressively disseminating her prophecies at the royal court, in the social circles in which she moved and in print, Davies attempted to transcend her body and the domesticity and patriarchy which defined it. Paradoxically, her efforts to gain agency were thwarted when her opponents interpreted her merely as a (female) body and dis-abled her prophetic voice. When her daughter Lucy, Countess

of Huntingdon, wrote her mother's epitaph, she described her as: "In a woman's body a man's spirit," alluding to the fact that Davies's prophecy was permanently entrenched in her body.[87]

Lucy's epitaph, pointing as it does to the troublesome nature of the female body, reminds us of the way Anna Trapnel's auditors try to 'empty out` her body in order to legitimize her prophetic activity. Authorizing the woman prophet cannot simply be a case of erasing her embodied femininity at the moment of utterance, since the ambivalence with which the female body is regarded suggests it is always problematic. The body is continually invoked in relation to seventeenth-century women prophets, both by supporters and enemies, whether in accusations of witchcraft, or in descriptions of the miraculously-transfigured body evincing the divine presence, as we have seen.

The witch's body operated as the intermediary between the devil and society. Hers was the chaotic, humoral female body *par excellence*, filled with dangerous substances which escaped to wreak havoc upon the world. As Diane Purkiss has noted, the threat of the witch lay in the fact that she inhabited social space shared by others: she was not isolated from communities, but circulated within them. Witchcraft is dependent upon an "interconnectedness of bodies," where the witch is able to penetrate the boundaries of other bodies, in order to control her victims.[88] As a fantasy of perverted maternity, the witch did not nurture, she contaminated and destroyed. She invaded and infected a body whose integrity was compromised by its many orifices, which made it vulnerable to evil influence. The mouth was symbolically the most important of these sites. Popular fantasies of witchcraft maintained that the witch preyed upon children and babies. The witch's body dispensed, not maternal milk, but *maleficia* or evil deeds. When Lady

Macbeth invokes demonic forces to substitute her milk for gall, she imagines herself as a witch, passing not nourishment but "direst cruelty" into her victims' mouths.

Anxieties about the contaminating ability of the female body are evident in seventeenth-century attacks upon women preachers, prophets and other similarly 'audible' women. Such a woman was infective when she spoke, and any man who listened to her was at risk of pollution. Dorothy Ludlow names this stereotyped figure the "Heretic Temptress," and argues that the reason for her existence in many misogynistic tracts was "to block the ears of men--by amusement or by sheepishness."[89] The fear of the female body is displaced into an attack upon women's rampant sexuality. Tracts like *The Holy Sisters Conspiracy against their Husbands* (1661) lament women's sexual behaviour once religious sectarianism had released them from the constraints of patriarchy. Excessive speech implied excessive sexuality. What links the witch with the prophetess is the mouth as the site of exchange between bodies. It connotes both the terrible consequences of intimacy with this woman for vulnerable and credulous individuals, and the destructive power of female utterance, which liberates the toxic fluids her body contains.

My purpose in noting the ambivalent relation between woman's body and female utterance is to argue that the urge to dispense with the body is so acute that both seventeenth- and twentieth-century commentators attempt to separate prophetic utterance from the female body, in the process of authorizing it. The imperfect female body was, of course, invoked by those who were hostile to women prophets. When contemporaries claimed that Mary Pennington was a witch, after she had converted to a Quaker, or that Eleanor Davies was mad, they were implicating the female body as the cause of the

prophets' putative deviance or criminality. Anne Wentworth is accused of being "a *Proud, Passionate, Revengeful, Discontented,* and *Mad Woman*" when she defies her abusive husband and publishes her prophecies.[90]

By definition a prophet must be validated by others, and in the case of seventeenth-century women, these others are always men. In 1654, Elinor Channel, from Crawley in Surrey, woke one night after a blow to her head and was compelled by an "audible voice" to go to London with a message from God for Oliver Cromwell.[91] Her husband tried to stop her, as they had many young children, but he eventually relented. In London, Channel met Arise Evans, and secured his help to get her prophecies published, having been repeatedly turned away from Cromwell's court. Evans's account of the cruelty Channel encounters on the London streets follows her prophetic writings, which were transcribed by him. Evans admits: "Truly, when this woman came to my house first, and began to speak, I did not expect to hear such solid things come from her; for I thought her to be the poorest senceless, harmless creature that ever I heard."[92]

The fact that Channel has been struck dumb by the force of God's power emphasizes the dichotomy between her subjectivity and the message she speaks. Evans portrays Channel in a way that minimizes her body, just as Anna Trapnel's supporters represented her afflicted and prophesying body so as to make explicit its vacuousness and passivity. If the gendered self is effaced for the duration of the prophetic utterance, Evans's narrative framing perpetuates this condition in print, privileging the utterance over the 'empty nothing' that utters it. Unlike Channel, Evans has a public persona independent of his prophetic activity, as is apparent from his contacts with printers and official figures. She brings a message

which requires Evans to act as an amanuensis so that it can be communicated to the world. As a plea for peace, Channel's prophecy brings her into the political arena, but paradoxically, Evans's role as auditor and publisher keeps her within patriarchal control. The text he writes denies her any possibility of agency.

I have suggested that the editors of seventeenth-century women's prophecy attempt to validate the utterance by distancing it from the female body. Since 'false' prophetesses and witches were indelibly associated with the female body, the process of authenticating prophetic speech meant recuperating it from the body, in order to affirm its divine provenance. The body remains a contentious issue for critics researching the lives and writings of women prophets. The critical response to Eleanor Davies is particularly instructive on this point of separating the female body from prophetic speech. As we have seen above, many of these ascribe mental instability to Davies. For example, Rachel Trubowitz comments that Davies was "genteel and sometimes insane."[93]

I have previously argued why diagnosing madness in a seventeenth-century subject is a dubious and inappropriate practice, and I do not intend to repeat myself here. However, it appears that the evidence for these diagnoses is Davies's putative 'bizarre' and 'inappropriate' behaviour, which is how her prophesying and the manner in which she publicized it have often been interpreted. Davies continues to be regarded as mad even by critics who acknowledge that her prophecies were fulfilled, most notably her prediction of the deaths of Charles I, the Duke of Buckingham and William Laud. I am suggesting that these critics, while they are prepared to validate Davies's prophecies, this is to the detriment of her body. They become complicit with the early modern construction of the female

body as the site and source of deviancy and mental illness, from which prophetic utterance had to be recovered.

Rehabilitating the prophetic body is important because it frees up the potential within that body for the creation of alternative feminine subjectivities to those pious women were expected to conform to. The possibility of heightening women's cultural visibility was not limited to the revolutionary potency of prophetic speech. The body also needs to be recognized as posing an equal if not greater challenge to efforts to domesticate women's piety. Prophecy should be interpreted as an interaction between the body and language, a notion which has frustrated the attempts of commentators to sever the connection between utterance and the gendered body. Attempting to make the female body redundant by pathologizing it renders the prophetic body devoid of meaning or agency, and colludes in the assumption that only prophetic utterance is significant. Reading prophecy as embodied allows us to think about women prophets as social agents and to perceive both their written and spoken utterance and their bodily expressions of piety as meaningful behaviour.

When both bodily experience and language are understood as tools which women prophets and ecstatics could appropriate in the process of creating radical gendered subjectivities, readers can begin to interrogate the way women are represented in biographical texts. The role of the literary critic analysing the (re)construction of female prophecy is to probe authorial intentions and ask whose interests are being served by a particular mode of representation. These accounts need to be compared with autobiographical writings by women prophets and ecstatics themselves, to consider the role writing plays in prophetic experience. Does the text constitute a refutation or

confirmation of prophecy? What does it ellide or emphasize? Is the act of writing therapeutic or defensive? What is the difference between prophetic experience and the text which reconstructs it?

Approaching the body as a meaningful text will be considered in the following chapter, which will discuss the relations between prophecy, hysteria and writing. The narrative of hysteria constitutes the history of the colonized female body. I want to suggest a parallel between the feminist reclaiming of the body of the hysteric from the psychoanalytic text, notably in the case of Ida Bauer in Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,* and the restitution of the body in the study of seventeenth-century women's prophecy. Can it be argued that the prophetic text is a hysterical text? What are the implications of hysteria for a study of seventeenth-century women's prophecy?

Notes

1 Jacques Du Bosqu, *The Compleat Woman, Written in French by Monsieur Du-Bosqu, and by him after severall Editions reviewed, corrected, and ammended: And now faithfully Translated into English, by N.N.* (London, 1639), p. 57.

2 On irrationality and female weakness, see Anthony Fletcher, "Men's construction of the female psyche was based upon a relativity which always credited them with less than men: weakness of mind, weakness of will, weakness of moral sense. In the weaker vessel the imagination ran riot," *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press,, 1995), p. 71.

3 On the influence of Aristotelean thought, and particularly *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, on early modern knowledge about sexual difference, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body And Gender From The Greeks To Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1992 PB ed., and Roy Porter & Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life. The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995).

4 On this point of the role of conduct books in the reformation of women's 'nature,' see Sara Heller Mendelson who, quoting William Gouge, remarks that: "Writers of conduct books noted (and deplored) the disparity between their own ideal of orderly hierarchy and 'the opinion of many wives, who thinke themselves in every way as good as their husbands, and in no way inferior to them.' This error was diagnosed as resulting from 'an ambitious and proud humour in women,

who must needs rule, or else thinke themselves slaves`," *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. 186.

5 Grace Jantzen, 'Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics,' *Hypatia* 9 (1994), 186-206 (p. 200).

6 For a note on the multiple meanings of enthusiasm, see Michael Heyd, "it should be emphasized that enthusiasm was by no means a unified phenomenon in the early modern period. Rather, it was a derogatory label, not a neutral designation of one homogenous group. Most frequently it referred to zealous sectarians, millenarians, prophesiers, and other radical groups and individuals who opposed the existing Church order...On another level, the label could be applied to various Platonist thinkers, to Paracelsian chemists, indeed, to the experimental philosophers of the Royal Society, and even to philosophers like Descartes. Finally, it was agreed that there was an affinity between enthusiasm and atheism, and that these seemingly opposite tendencies actually reinforced each other," "*Be Sober And Reasonable." The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, New York & London: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 4.

7 I borrow this phrase from *Prose Studies. History, Theory, Criticism.* Special Issue on *Pamphlet Wars. Prose in the English Revolution* 14 (1991).

8 On the origins and consequences of Calvinism in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English protestantism, see, for example, John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); William Haller, *The Rise of Protestantism* (Philadelphia: The University of Philadelphia Press, 1972); Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-*

Century Revolution (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1993); John R. Knott, *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560-1662* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1970);

9 Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena: Or A Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of many of the Sectaries of this time* (London, 1646), title page; Mary Ellwood and Margery Clipsham, *The SPIRIT that works Abomination And Its Abominable Work DISCOVERED* (London? 1685), title page.

10 John Finet used this phrase upon observing the Star Chamber trial of the three outspoken critics of Archbishop Laud, William Prynne, John Bastwick and Henry Burton in 1637. Quoted in John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 139.

11 Edwards, *Gangraena*, pp. 3-4.

12 Ibid., p. 26.

13 In common with other radical separatist groups like the Brownists and the Ranters, Antinomians rejected both ecclesiastical authority and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. What was distinctive about advocates of Antinomianism was their denial of sin and rejection of all human laws. See also Christopher Hill's chapter on "Antinomianism" in *Liberty Against The Law. Some Seventeenth-Century Controversies* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1996), pp. 214-226.

14 Ibid., p. 2.

15 Ibid., p. 3.

16 On the similarities between the witch and the female prophet, see Phyllis Mack, 'Feminine Symbolism and Feminine Behaviour in Radical Religious Movements: Franciscans, Quakers and the Followers of Gandhi' in Jim Obelkevich et al. (ed.) *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 115-130. For a further discussion of women's liminality within culture, see Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing with an introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) and Laurie Schapira, *The Cassandra Complex: Living With Disbelief. A Modern Perspective on Hysteria* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1988).

17 An account of a monstrous birth caused by Anabaptist beliefs appears in *Gangraena, Second Part*, pp. 3-4. For other relevant cases of 'bad mothers,' see *Bloody Newes from Dover. Being a True Relation of the great and bloudy Murder, committed by Mary Champion (an Anabaptist) who cut off her Childs head* (London? 1646); *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants: Being An Account of The Tryal, Co[n]demnation and Execution of Mary Goodenough* (London, 1692); *A Pittilesse Mother. That most vnaturally... murthered two of her own Children at Acton* (London? 1616); *The Ranters Monster: Being a true Relation of one Mary Adams* (London, 1652).

18 *Bloody Newes*, title page.

19 Elwood and Clipsham, *The SPIRIT*, sig. A2v (p. 4).

20 Ibid., p. 5.

21 I am indebted to Katherine Hodgkin for this point. In her study of the religious madness experienced by seventeenth-century gentlewoman Dionys Fitzherbert, she notes that although Fitzherbert rejected all other early modern forms of madness, including melancholy, to describe her affliction, she did refer to herself as

'distracted.' See 'Conceits of Mind, Conceits of Body: Dionys Fitzherbert and the Discourses of Religion and Madness' contained in *The Nature of Religious Language. A Colloquium* edited by Stanley E. Porter, Roehampton Institute London Papers 1, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 249-268 (p. 265). Hodgkin's thesis contains a transcription of Dionys Fitzherbert's manuscript autobiography. See *Dionys Fitzherbert and the Writing on Madness*, unpublished M.Phil thesis, (University of Sussex, 1994).

22 Ibid., p. 3.

23 Ibid., p. 4.

24 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Recollections*, quoted in Neil Hertz, 'Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure' in *The End of The Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 173-4.

25 Catherine Gallagher, 'A Response,' in Hertz, pp. 194-196.

26 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, translated by Ephraim Fischoff and introduced by Talcott Parsons (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 104; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 140; Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, second edition (London: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1978).

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Merskey, *The Analysis of Hysteria* (London: Ballière Tindall, 1979), p. 158.

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32 Alfred Cohen, 'Prophecy and Madness,' p. 430n.

33 Eleanor Davies, *Bethlehem Signifying the House of Bread* (London, 1652), pp. 5-6.

34 Megan Matchinske, 'Holy Hatred: Formations of the Gendered Subject in English Apocalyptic Writing, 1625-1651,' *English Literary History* 60 (1993), 349-377 (p. 366).

35 Richard Baukham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 1.

36 Mary Cary, *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* (London, 1653), pp. 16-17.

37 Megan Matchinske, 'Holy Hatred,' p. 365.

38 Christine Berg and Philippa Berry, '"Spiritual Whoredom:" An essay on female prophets in the seventeenth century,' in Francis Barker et al. (ed.) *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1981), pp. 39-40.

39 Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style. The Rhetoric of*

Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 16.

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41 Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen. Seventeenth-century radical sectarian writing and feminist criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). See especially Chapter One, 'Sectarian writing, the literary canon, and feminist criticism,' pp. 1-17.

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Social Control (New York & London: Routledge, 1996); Bryan R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

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52 Ibid., p. 112.

53 Ibid., p. 139.

54 Ibid., p. 203.

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 20; Phyllis Mack, 'Women as Prophets During the English Civil War,' *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982), 19-45 (p. 24).

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61 *The Female Advocate...Written by a Lady in Vindication of her Sex* (London, 1686), p. iii.

62 Diane Willen, 'Women and Religion in Early Modern England,' in Sherrin Marshall (ed.) *Women in Reformation and Counter Reformation Europe: Private and Public Worlds* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 140-165 (p. 140).

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65 Thomas, p. 321.

66 Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (London, 1654), p. 42.

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71 *A Question Deeply concerning Married Persons, and such as intend to Marry: Propounded and Resolved According to the Scriptures* (London, 1653), sig. A2v.

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73 See, for example, Anthony Fletcher, "The religious settlement was a horrified retreat from the prospect of social anarchy, an alliance of parson and squire in the interests of class and order. Some of those dispossessed of their livings recognized this and rejoiced in it as much as the cavaliers and Anglicans. 'Though soon after the settlement of the nation,' wrote Henry Newcome later in his autobiography, 'we saw ourselves as the despised and cheated party, yet I would not change conditions to have it as it was then, as bad as it is'. For then, he declared, 'we lay at the mercy of a giddy, hot-headed, bloody multitude'. Philip Henry, who felt he had to resign

his living, saw the principle of a single place of worship as a basic cement for society. 'The danger,' he commented on the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence, 'is lest the allowance of separate places help to overthrow our parish order'. The Independents, he believed, 'unchurch the nation...they pluck up the hedge of parish order,'" 'The Godly Divided: The End of Religious Unity in Protestant England,' *Seventeenth Century* 5 (1990), 185-194 (p. 191).

74 Joe Lee Davies, 'Mystical versus Enthusiastic Sensibility,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1963), 301-319 (p. 306).

75 Anna Trapnel, *The Cry*, p. 14.

76 Phyllis Mack, 'Women as Prophets,' pp. 28-9.

77 Anna Trapnel, *Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea. Or, A Narrative of her Journey from London into Cornwal* (London, 1654), p. 3.

78 George Garden, *Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon* (London, 1699), p. 41.

79 On the similarities between early modern female prophecy and nineteenth-century women mediums, see Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Virago, 1989).

80 Anna Trapnel, *Report and Plea*, p. 21; *A Legacy for Saints; Being Several Experiences of the dealings of God with Anna Trapnel* (London, 1654), pp. 26-7.

81 Anna Trapnel, *Voice for the King of Saints and Nations* (London, 1658), p. 72n.

82 Anna Trapnel, *The Hymn to the Merchants* published in *The Cry*, 30-33 (p. 30).

83 Arise Evans, *An Echo To The Voice from Heaven. Or, A Narration of the Life, and manner of the special Calling, and Visions of Arise Evans* (London, 1652), pp. 28-9.

84 Ibid., p. 49.

85 Peter Heylyn, *Cyprianus Anglicus* (London, 1668), p. 266.

86 Arise Evans, *An Echo*, p. 50.

87 Lucy's epitaph is reprinted in the Memorial-Introduction to *The Complete Poems of Sir John Davies* ed. Alexander B. Grosart, two volumes, vol. 1 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), pp. lv-lvi.

88 Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996). See especially Chapter Five 'No Limit: The body of the witch,' 119-144 (p. 123).

89 Dorothy Ludlow, 'Shaking Patriarchy's Foundations: Sectarian Women in England, 1641-1700,' in Richard L. Greaves (ed.), *Triumph Over Silence*, 93-123 (pp. 98-9).

90 Mary Pennington, *Some Account of Circumstances in the Life of Mary Pennington, from her Manuscript, left for her Family* (London: Printed for Harvey & Darton, 1821), p. 41; Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* (London? 1677), sig. A1v.

91 Elinor Channel, *A Message from God, [By a Dumb woman]. To his Highness the Lord Protector* (London, 1654), sig. A2r.

92 Arise Evans, *A Word from God To the Commons of England and Wales* contained in Channel, *A Message*, p. 9.

93 Trubowitz, p. 116.

Chapter Two:

Vocabularies of Dis-Ease:
Reading Prophecy and Hysteria in Early Modern and Modern Culture

In *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), Susanna Kaysen records her experiences as an eighteen-year-old patient at McLean psychiatric hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she was diagnosed and treated for borderline personality disorder over a period of almost two years. After describing the consultation with a psychiatrist she had never seen before, which led to her admission at McLean, Kaysen contextualises her experience as a patient within the history of mental illness and its cultural analogues with a single-page section entitled 'Etiology:`

> This person is (pick one):
>
> 1. on a perilous journey from which we can learn much when he or she returns;
> 2. possessed by (pick one):
>
> a) the gods,
>
> b) God (that is, a prophet),
>
> c) some bad spirits, demons, or devils,
>
> d) the Devil;
>
> 3. a witch;
> 4. bewitched (variant of 2);
> 5. bad, and must be isolated and punished;
> 6. ill, and must be isolated and treated by (pick one):
>
> a) purging and leeches,
>
> b) removing the uterus if the person has one,
>
> c) electric shock to the brain,

d) cold sheets wrapped tight around the body,

e) Thorazine or Stelazine;

7. ill, and must spend the next seven years talking about it;

8. a victim of society's low tolerance for deviant behavior;

9. sane in an insane world;

10. on a perilous journey from which he or she may never return.[1]

Although Kaysen does not gender the individual whose behaviour the reader is being invited to diagnose, two categories in particular (uterine pathology and witch) demonstrate that, historically and culturally, woman have been highly visible among psychiatric patients, witches and the possessed. What is ironic about this exhaustive list of multiple aetiologies is that despite the shifting of diagnostic categories, the continuous iteration of the female body as the ultimate source of women's pathological and deviant behaviour has persisted.

In 'Etiology,' Kaysen condenses historical-cultural attitudes to deviancy and madness into a multiple-choice-style format, where the casual suggestion that the reader "pick one" appears to be a comment both on the arbitrary nature of interpretation and the redundancy of the subject's own understanding of her/his experiences. Kaysen's efforts to make herself audible and intelligible in the consulting room were silenced by the psychiatrist's bullying paternalism, pressuring her into acquiescing in her own commital to the psychiatric hospital. Reading 'Etiology' in the context of this account suggests that Kaysen imagines the auditors of madness as male, generating and professionalizing technologies of therapy and restraint, which are predicated upon a denial of the agency of the

subject defined as mad. Kaysen's autobiographical account constitutes an attempt to insert herself into the psychiatric discourse which excluded her subjectivity from its interpretation of her behaviour.

I have chosen to begin this chapter on the interrelations between prophecy and hysteria with a discussion of Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* because it raises a number of points which I want to consider and expand upon. In the extract quoted above, Kaysen lists the reactions mad or deviant behaviour has historically elicited from the culture in which it occurs. When a form of behaviour is defined as neurotic, criminal or of demonic provenance, this act of definition constitutes an assessment of the level of interaction between the individual and the community. It considers, for instance, the degree of threat or disruption posed by the individual, and the punitive or remedial measures necessary to manage the individual and perpetuate the interests of the community. When we investigate madness in history, what we find is not individual cases of madness or, more precisely, madness specifically from the *individual's* point of view, but the institutional responses to madness: in other words, madness as it is socially constructed.

Kaysen presents her reader with a survey of shifting attitudes towards what is defined as neurotic and psychotic illness in twentieth-century psychiatric terminology. By inserting her story into a history of madness and identifying a commonality of suffering, Kaysen appears to suggest that the experience of powerlessness is shared by afflicted individuals across historical periods and regardless of existing therapeutic or disciplinary regimes. What is not necessarily apparent from her survey is that an uncomplicated progression from the bad witch to the sick neurotic, from popular

religion with its attendant 'superstition' to a secular and enlightened medical science, cannot be assumed. As Foucault puts it in *The History of Sexuality*, "nervous illness is certainly not the truth of possession, but the medicine of hysteria is not unrelated to the earlier direction of "obsessed" women."[2] We should not expect to find within a given historical period clear distinctions between pathological and religious behaviour.

In the early modern period, it is not the case that there were unambiguous and distinct 'cases' of witchcraft, demonic possession and hysteria, but rather that there were cultural phenomena which *could* be construed as witchcraft, demonic possession or hysteria, and which were the object of fierce and much contested debate by theologians, physicians and other interested parties, who attempted to conclusively explain a cultural event and make the need for further discussion redundant. Therefore, I argue that in early modern culture, a proximity existed between hysteria, witchcraft and experiential forms of religiosity (including ecstasy and prophecy).

Such a proximity developed because of the relationship between the site of the manifestations, the body, and the culture which scrutinized it. Knowledge about the body was produced by a sense of curiosity about its interiority. What could be glimpsed along the body's surfaces raised tantalizing questions about what was concealed behind them. Decoding a bodily phenomenon as hysterical symptom, sign of divine immanence, or proof of possession by a malevolent agency, constitutes as act of situating the body within a matrix of natural and supernatural influences. The more prodigious or remarkable the manifestation, the more important the process of comprehending it becomes, in order that it might be assimilated into the cosmology of the culture rather than bring into question its

integrity.

Is what distinguishes the hysterical body from the ecstatic or mystical body simply an alternative reading? What sort of body is necessary for pathological and religious experience to inhabit proximate space? I suggest that the difference embodied in femininity determines the apparent synchrony of experiential and pathological bodily practices within the female body, necessitating the work of explication which ultimately results in its objectification. Early modern cases where various 'experts' attempt to establish hysteria, witchcraft or demonic possession constitute efforts to theorize the female body and master its mysterious otherness. I will consider a number of seventeenth-century cases of visible cultural manifestations which emanated from, or across, the body, including the Boy of Bilson/William Perry's factitious possession and Mary Glover's 'hysteria,' and suggest how they relate to women's prophecy.

The texts which describe the civil and legal 'courts' and their clerical and medical witnesses which were constructed around an emergent 'case' provide evidence about the social processes of (de)legitimacy. If the status of the female body in these deliberations was passive, her speech irrelevant and redundant, since the investigative exchanges were conducted exclusively between authoritative figures who debated their different interpretions, what must have been the impact of the woman prophet *as* author, whose voice intervened in the public debate about her activities from which she was meant to be excluded? If, as I want to argue, there exists a cultural imperative towards somatizing female experience: that is, delineating experience within the body and restricting its wider exposure, then by writing is it possible for

women to contest somatization, recover their agency and become 'more' than 'just' a body?

Prophecy, as a form of religious expression in which the body is transcended, occurred within an early modern patriarchal culture which contained the sexual subversiveness of prophecy by representing the woman prophet as a mere body. Paradoxically it offered opportunities for agency even as the social regulation of women's religious activity closed these down. Rather than perceiving this doubleness negatively, we could say that as a concept prophecy contained within itself interstices which could enable women to empower themselves through their religiosity and writing.

Although this thesis takes as its subject seventeenth-century England, this chapter's comparison of hysteria and prophecy will begin by taking into account the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition to considering hysteria and experiential religion, including prophecy, as possible explanations for forms of social behaviour which present themselves as dilemmas, I want to think about hysteria and prophecy in terms of feminist theory and psychoanalytical and psychological history. Hysteria functions as an appropriate trope for the shifting modalities which have explicated the female body, itself a protean syndrome which historically has confounded physicians' attempts to locate it within medical nosology. For a medical science that believed itself to be superseding 'erroneous' popular belief and superstition, hysteria represented a form of resistance to its paradigms: both it, and the female body upon which it manifested itself and which came to be seen as complicit with it, constituted a troublesome excess which theory could never quite contain.

The mythology of hysteria implicated the uterus, which unlike other organs was not fixed, but was able to travel through the body in search of nourishment. This voracious organ, known as 'the mother' or 'the matrix' to Renaissance and early modern practitioners, could cause symptoms by prolonged occupation of one part of the body but could be persuaded to move by the application of foul-smelling or fragrant unguents. A foul smell would discourage the uterus from occupying a diseased part of the body, while a sweet one would help to draw it towards a more healthful position. The uterus elicited specific anxieties in men because of its status as a rampant, autonomous organ. It wreaked havoc among women patients, yet concealed itself within the body. The only indication of its presence was the menstrual fluids. The treatment of uterine pathology with aromatherapy, an attempt to influence a mobile agent, suggests that physicians did not regard the uterus as a subordinate organ, but rather as Edward Shorter has commented in his *A History of Women's Bodies*: "a separate animal creature housed inside a woman," unpredictable, wilful and dangerous.[3]

Despite the belief that hysteria was caused by the behaviour of the uterus, autopsies failed to find any uterine irregularities in the cadavers of women who had suffered from hysteria but died from something else. Thomas Willis, the seventeenth-century neurologist and physiologist, sought to understand hysterical symptoms through post-mortem research. In her *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*, Ilza Veith comments that his autopsies "disclosed...that the uterus was untouched by disease," and Willis subsequently developed a theory of hysteria which implicated the animal spirits in the brain.[4] The

brain was virtually always the source of hysterical symptoms, which might manifest themselves anywhere in the body. Willis did not discount the theory of uterine pathology altogether, which proved remarkably durable, even though there was scant anatomical evidence to support it. The association between hysteria and the womb has persisted to the present day. As a result, modern psychiatry has attempted to dispense with the term 'hysteria' altogether. The 'Bible' of twentieth-century psychiatry, the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual,* has discarded a term it regards as pejorative in favour of the gender-neutral conversion and somatoform disorders. (The former term refers to the 'conversion' or manifestation of psychic disturbances as somatic symptoms).[5]

Hysteria constituted an anomaly to pre-nineteenth century physicians, who had been trained to treat diseases which had detectable somatic causes. In contemporary terminology, psychosomatic and conversion disorders, like other psychiatric conditions, are defined as 'functional.' This means that there is no known somatic or physiological cause; similarly, a 'syndrome' being an illness for which no organic aetiology exists.

Although it was a relatively simple matter to define hysteria in relation to what it was *not*: in other words, not somatic, much of the professional exasperation hysteria created and continues to create in early modern and modern physicians has resulted from its ability to mimic the symptoms of virtually any other (organic) pathology. 'Classic' hysterical symptoms included the ball in the throat, a choking sensation: the *globus hystericus,* aphasia (loss of voice), paralysis and pains in different parts of the body. But the physician's task of diagnosing and treating his patient was hindered

by the fact that few cases conformed to this 'classic' pattern. In 1764, the Scottish physician Robert Whytt ruefully concurred with Thomas Sydenham that nervous diseases, like hysterical ones:

> are so many, so various, and so irregular, that it would be extremely hard, either rightly to describe, or fully to enumerate them. They imitate the symptoms of almost all other diseases; and indeed, there are few chronic distempers with which they are not more or less blended or intermixed.[6]

Hysteria frustrated the efforts of physicians to 'catalogue' it: it remained elusive and ultimately impenetrable, (re)producing itself in ever more varied and complex symptoms. Elaine Showalter notes that hysteria "mimics culturally permissible expressions of distress."[7] In the postmodern period and to non-clinicians at least, the plurality of hysteria is experienced not so much as problematic as invigorating and striking in its contemporaneity. We speak of 'hysterias' rather than a single, unified 'hysteria.' Mark Micale has commented: "Like the historical object it takes as its subject...the new hysteria studies are diverse, protean and polymorphous."[8] Hysteria is no longer understood simply as a (perhaps extinct) condition which disrupts established medical knowledge, but as a syndrome which seems to exemplify the postmodern condition.

What is interesting, and suggestive in terms of the similarities between the hysteric and the prophetic body, is the responses hysteria's functionalism has elicited from physicians, alienists and psychoanalysts. The fact that repeated autopsies and investigations could not consistently establish a uterine pathology

did not prevent a view of the hysterical woman which perpetuated the identical fear of the female viscera. While the womb had been understood as an uncannily free agent, the woman who possessed it was never entirely free of its contaminating taint: hence the taboo of menstrual blood.

In the nineteenth century, clinical attitudes towards the woman hysteric began to construct her as only ambiguously a 'victim' of illness. Attitudes shifted from a professional irritation at hysteria's ever-burgeoning symptomatic array, to perceiving women hysterics simultaneously as histrionic, posturing monsters and highly 'feminine' women. Hysterics were understood as complicit in their own illness, and consequently physicians brought into question the authenticity of their 'symptoms.' Was the hysteric genuinely sick, or were her symptoms factitious? Was she manipulating her physician because she craved (sexual) attention? As the reader will have noticed, the hysteric was not necessarily a 'bad' woman. Increasingly, she was Everywoman, or she was even *more* 'feminine' than the 'average' woman. The hysteric was not a 'natural' woman in the strictest sense, but rather one who conformed closely to patriarchal notions of femininity.

As a consequence of this, the hysteric's relationship with male physicians vacillated between approving her femininity and denouncing its toxicity. Jean-Martin Charcot's assistant at the Salpétrière hospital in Paris, Charles Richet, remarked of 'light' (presumably less severe) hysteria, that it was "not really an illness...One might even say that hysterics are more womanly than other women."[9] But "more womanly" did not mean morally exemplary, for hyperfemininity is proven to be destructive and repellent. Despite representing the woman hysteric as a social deviant whose appalling

crimes they are only too willing to catalogue, physicians and alienists maintain a sense of unprofessional knowingness, as if treating hysterics is not so much about objective clinical practice as a confirmation of the *universal* badness of women's natures. Jules Falret, a psychiatrist at the Salpétrière, wrote in his "Folie raisonnante ou folie morale" (1866):

> These patients are veritable actresses; they do not know of a greater pleasure than to deceive...all those with whom they come in touch. The hysterics who exaggerate their convulsive movements...make an equal travesty and exaggeration of the movements of their soul, their ideas, and their acts...In one word, the life of the hysteric is one perpetual falsehood; they affect the airs of piety and devotion and let themselves be taken for saints while at the same time secretly abandoning themselves to the most shameful actions; and at home, before their husbands and children, making the most violent scenes in which they employ the coarsest and most obscene language and give themselves up to the most disorderly actions.[10]

If the body of the hysteric constitutes a text, Falret is a sceptical reader, interpreting it as a confabulation: a fantastic story, engineered entirely by the hysteric herself. By filling his account with such phrases as "actress," "exaggeration," "affect" and "scenes," he emphasizes the dramatic nature of female hysteria. Falret's hysteric is a credible and persuasive actress, ostensibly a saint to her physician while inflicting cruelty and violence upon her 'innocent` husband and children. Writing in 1930, F. Wittels echoes Falret, describing the hysteric as an actress who, though "capable of

achievements that cannot be surpassed," remains "unreliable...at times unsupportably bad." He continues:

> Even as a saint the hysteric cannot be relied upon, and occasionally lapses into the demonic. As a loving woman she represents a veritable martyrdom for the serious, compulsive male who, enwrapped in love and enjoyment in an hour of happiness, sees himself betrayed the following day. The hysterical character never frees itself from its fixation on the infantile level. Hence it cannot attain its actuality as a grown-up human being: it plays the part of a child and also of the women.''

Wittels acknowledges the hysteric' s talent for self-dramatization, but significantly, he contains the threatening eroticism of hysteria by focusing not upon it but upon emotionality as the defining aspect of the condition, an emotionality which is markedly infantile and immature. By commenting that hysteria "plays the part of a child and also of the *women*," Wittels suggests that the subordinate status of the female sex is *emotionally* as well as biologically determined. The aim of Wittel`s text is to enable his reader to expose the superficiality of the hysteric' s bravura performance. Sympathy should be directed away from the dissembling hysteric and towards her 'invisible victims,` who live out the life of martyrdom she feigns. He reads the hysteric in terms of her inauthenticity, which suggests the question of what sort of status the hysteric actually possesses? Is she "unreliable" as a patient, or as a woman?

To answer this question, we need to consider a paradox which was

created by the nineteenth-century 'theatres' of hysteria at the Salpétrière hospital in Paris, where the great and the good thrilled to the performances of Jean-Martin Charcot's 'pet' hysterics, presided over by the great man himself. It is ironic that Falret, who practised at the Salpétrière during Charcot's tenure as chief of clinical services (Charcot possessed almost total control of the hospital, which was the largest in Paris), objected so strenuously to the 'dramatics' of hysteria in the light of Charcot's use of hypnotism and manual manipulation to 'produce' the symptoms of hysteria.

Charcot discovered that pressing upon certain parts of the female body induced a hysterical attack. These were "hysterogenic zones," and Charcot developed mechanical apparatus, such as the uterine compressor, which, once strapped onto the hysteric's body, could create or inhibit symptoms. In 1878, Charcot recuperated hypnotism, which had recently become discredited, for use in his medical practice. He became convinced that a patient's susceptibility to hypnotic suggestion was an indication of hysteria. He thus regarded the hypnotic trance and the hysterical attack as analogous. Freud learnt the technique of hypnotism from Charcot and from Hippolyte Bernheim at Nancy, another French school of psychiatry where concerted efforts were made to discredit Charcot's theories. Freud wrote: "There was something positively seductive in working with hypnotism. For the first time there was a sense of having overcome one's helplessness, and it was highly flattering to enjoy the reputation of being a miracle worker."[12] Charcot's innovative treatment of hysteria undoubtedly created considerable excitement among his colleagues. Hysteria, formerly the elusive neurosis, could now be made to appear and disappear. The illness was now at the

physician's bidding, rather than the other way (the *wrong* way) around. Medical science had conquered it. As Martha Noel Evans remarks:

> Reading contemporary reports about the use of hypnosis at the Salpétrière and especially looking at the pictures that were taken, one gets the distinct impression that these medical men felt they had discovered a wonderful toy, one they could play with, experiment with, do whatever they wanted with...Hysteria--and the patients who suffered from it--had thus fallen under their will and dominion.[13]

As Evans notes, the authority conferred on the alienist by his hypnotic skill was not limited to an experience of gratifying professional kudos for the alienist himself, but was also manufactured for the benefit of observers of the 'scenes' themselves and the photographs which replicated their theatricality for a wider international audience.[14] Artists and photographers were present to record the hysterical attacks, and their images were published in the three-volume *iconographies*. Charcot was a *visuel*, the appellation conferred on him by Freud; (whereas Freud, who utilized what his patient Anna O. "aptly" described as his "talking cure," listened).[15] For him, the therapeutic process consisted of constructing a coherent narrative from the patient's fragmentary relations of her/his experience. Writing up the case history of Elisabeth von R., his first full-length analysis of a case of hysteria, Freud set out his first principles of analysis which he "later developed into a regular method and employed deliberately." The entire process of "clearing away the pathogenic psychical

material layer by layer," beginning with the superficial details and then probing deeper into the patient's memories, was "based on the expectation that it would be possible to establish a completely adequate set of determinants for the events concerned."[16]

For Charcot, the gaze was not merely a therapeutic tool, it was employed in the production and representation of hysteria. Observers of Charcot's twice-weekly clinics remarked on his mesmerizing gaze and commanding presence. He could be belligerent and intimidating to his patients, especially if they got 'above themselves' and forgot whose show it really was, by interrupting his lecture, for instance. Charcot's penetrating gaze bespoke both his skill as a hypnotist and his absolute control as director and producer of the hysterical demonstrations. But it is undoubtedly the case that Charcot's hypnotism cannot not be separated from its staging.

Much debate has centred on the authenticity of Charcot's clinics with speculation as to whether the 'star' hysterics were in actuality actresses, whose performances were "coached," as Charles Bernheimer puts it.[17] Charcot ostensibly rejected many of the assumptions about hysteria. He argued that hysteria was not a uterine, and therefore exclusively feminine, pathology. On the other hand, Charcot believed it was abnormal for men to suffer from hysteria. A happy consequence of this fact was that male hysteria was much easier to treat: "One might say that the disease has been transported into a soil that doesn't suit it...[in males] it is a fire easily put out. It's as simple as pie."[18] If Charcot regarded himself as a 'miracle worker,' as Freud did, he probably felt that the more intractable nature of female hysteria justified a dominating and aggressive mode of treatment. Another of Charcot's beliefs which casts doubt on his apparent 'ungendered' attitude to hysteria is a famous remark

related by Freud, who overheard Charcot assert during a discussion about the causes of hysteria: "C' est toujours la chose génitale...toujours...toujours...toujours" ("It is always the genital thing...always...always...always").[19] Charcot seems to have harboured, at least in private, the sort of sexualized assumptions about hysteria which might have encouraged the stereotyped staging of hysterical symptoms. Charcot's iconographical representation of hysteria concretized it into a series of facial expressions and bodily contortions. Charcot imposed a rigid conformity over hysterical patients by creating inventories of their symptoms. The Swiss neurologist Paul Dubois remarked of the Salpétrière: "All cases of hysteria resemble each other. At the command of the chief of the staff, or of the interns, they begin to act like marionnettes, or like circus horses accustomed to repeat the same evolutions."[20]

The audience could experience Charcot's explicit theatricality as highly artificial rather than powerfully compelling, perhaps because some of its members recognized that, as participants, they colluded in Charcot' s scopophilia. Ultimately, the legacy of Charcot's iconographical representation of hysteria ensured that the abiding image of the hysteric would be a sexualized one: Blanche Wittman's swooning, almost pornographic body in André Brouillet's (in)famous engraving.

Some of Charcot's more sceptical contemporaries argued that his clinics and the *iconographies* created factitious psychopathological illness since, in demonstrating the physical signs of madness, they taught women what they needed to do in order to be perceived as mad. His critics asserted that the difficulty of distinguishing between actual and feigned madness created a serious flaw in Charcot's theories.

It was even alleged that since cases of the severe form of hysteria known as *grande hysterié* reached virtually epidemic proportions at the Salpétrière but remained rare everywhere else, Charcot was actually inducing this illness in the women patients in his care. It was hardly coincidental that *grande hysterié* was a highly dramatic, florid manifestation of hysteria, with its violent, epileptic-like seizures.

Iatrogenesis: Medicine, Gender and the Manufacture of Symptoms

An iatrogenic illness is one created by the relationship between a doctor and a patient. While it is impossible to ascertain exactly how many of Charcot's hysterics were professional actresses, and how many were genuinely ill, we *can* reasonably conclude that iatrogenesis is fundamental to the development of hysterical symptoms within a culture. Since hysteria is understood as a syndrome which simulates legitimate, culturally-sanctioned symptoms, the need to differentiate between authentic and pretended illness becomes increasingly redundant, since it would be inaccurate to define hysteria as self-produced, but rather as *culturally*-produced. Yet what nineteenth-century attitudes towards hysteria disclose is that the female hysteric is regularly imagined as a dissembling, egotistical self. How can we account for the 'double bind' situation that female hysterics find themselves in, where they are both conditioned to perform as hysterics, and villified as actresses? Why does it not occur to Jules Falret that his condemnations of women hysterics are contradicted by the overtness of nineteenth-century 'stagings' of hysteria and therefore cannot fail to strike the reader as perverse?

Comparing nineteenth-century hysteria with twentieth-century attitudes towards factitious illnesses like Munchausen syndrome is suggestive with regards to this point. What distinguishes factitious illness from somatoform disorder is that in the latter, symptoms are not consciously feigned, whereas a factitious patient deliberately commits an act of disease forgery. Unlike someone who practices malingering behaviour, the factitious patient's goal is not a material one. Instead, the patient role is deliberately sought in order to gain emotional gratification.

A factitious disorder may develop when an individual is admitted to hospital for treatment for a 'genuine' condition. This patient, who is statistically more likely to be a woman and may suffer from emotional deprivation as a result of a history of childhood abuse or unstable inter-personal relationships, discovers that being ill attracts the care, sympathy and attention which is normally absent from her life. Factitious illness is usually accompanied by some form of personality disorder. At some point the patient decides that the only way she can get emotional fulfillment is *as* a patient, which induces her to fabricate symptoms in order to receive medical attention. She discovers that it is not difficult or necessarily dangerous to create credible symptoms (although chronic factitious patients do risk significant damage to their health by subjecting themselves to a battery of investigations, operations and treatments for non-existent illnesses). Chronic factitious patients are itinerant, moving between hospitals and regions in their efforts to excape detection and exposure by medical personnel.[21]

It could be objected that the category of factitious illness assumes a clear distinction between genuine and dissimulated illness, and between conscious and unconscious motives. What is

emphasized about the factitious patient is her conscious decision to dissimulate illness. The situation of being ill and exploiting that illness in ways which are diametrically opposed to the restoration of health is not simply abnormal or pathological, but wilful and deviant. Therefore, the factitious patient is treated less like an unfortunate sick person, and more like someone who is fully responsible for her actions. The factitious individual may retain the description of 'patient,' but she is implicated in a way that so-called 'genuine' patients rarely are. The inference is that the existence of conscious motives in the patient role is pathological and exploitative.

Distinguishing between somatoform or psychosomatic illness and factitious disorders certainly fails on a historical level, since conversion disorder, which has replaced the now-deleted hysteria, is today classed under somatoform illness, whereas to many nineteenth-century physicians, as we have seen, hysteria in women was either wholly or in part a factitious illness.

The key to the question of what induces physicians to react negatively to hysterics and factitious patients lies in the iatrogenic causation of these disorders, in which the physician is implicated to an equal, if not greater, degree as the patient. The confusion over the status of the hysteric or factitial individual as either patient or fraud appears to be the result of the physician's attempts to dominate the symbiotic relationship in which the condition itself developed. Initially, hysteria was not 'about' the male exploitation of women's bodies. The relationship between the physician and the hysteric would have been untenable without mutual benefits and rewards. But the physician's desire for mastery meant that equality with his 'patient' was impossible. In other words, the

sense we have of some nineteenth-century physicians' repugnance towards the hysterics they treated is replicated in modern clinicians' attitudes towards factitious illness.

In their study *Patient Or Pretender*, Marc Feldman and Charles Ford discuss several cases of what they sensationally describe as "The Deadliest Game Of All:" Munchausen syndrome by proxy (MBP), the rare variant disorder where sufferers induce signs of illness in children. The authors claim that this disorder is statistically underrepresented as a cause of child abuse "because of underdiagnosis." They state that: *"Not every case of child abuse is Munchausen by proxy, but every case of Munchausen by proxy is child abuse"* (italics authors' own emphasis).[22] For this reason, they urge health care practitioners to be highly vigilant for signs of MBP, as if they do not they are in effect collaborating with the abusive guardian or parent, who is usually the mother.

Throughout the book, Feldman and Ford have stressed that psychiatric treatment is critical for factitious patients, including those with the severe disorders Munchausen syndrome and Munchausen syndrome by proxy, as these syndromes are associated with a degree of personality disorder. As is the case with normal factitious illness, women form the majority of MBP sufferers (although this is not the case for patients with Munchausen syndrome, who tend to be male). Feldman and Ford have this to say about how they reconcile the issue of abuse of children with MBP as a psychopathological illness:

> Although these women are suffering from a mental disorder, it cannot be used as an excuse for abuse. We believe that psychiatric diagnoses should have rather limited use in

explaining crime. And that's true for Munchausen by proxy. We say we can explain some of the behavior *(sic)* on the basis of personality disorders, but as long as they know right from wrong, we hold them responsible. Most of these patients are not psychotic; in fact, very few of them are, and they almost always meet the legal definitions of sanity and responsibility. In a similar way, pedophilia *(sic)* is listed by psychiatrists as a mental disorder, but certainly we proceed with the prosecution of adults who feel driven to abuse children sexually.[23]

One of the aims of books written about factitious disorders is to educate the medical and nursing professions, who not surprisingly assume a patient presenting with symptoms is genuinely in pain rather than dissimulating illness. (A problem with this principle is that a patient seeking medical attention by pretending to be ill *is* likely to be 'in pain,' but apparently psychological pain is perceived as *less* acceptable than that which has an organic cause). But if many physicians are ignorant of factitious disorders, because of their comparative rarity, when such a patient *is* discovered, the reaction from clinicians is one of anger and disgust. Undoubtedly this has something to do with the difficulty of believing that an individual could invent symptoms, and with the fact that factitial patients 'waste' precious medical resources which would be 'better spent' on a genuinely ill patient. But what is important is that the status of the factitious individual as a patient is replaced by a criminally deviant one. It is hardly surprising that the factitious patient will do almost anything to escape detection, which would destroy their identity as a patient necessary for psychological survival.

The stigma still suffered by psychiatric patients and their

families indicates that popular attitudes towards mental illness are considerably less sympathetic than to an organic disease like cancer. But in the case of factitious disorders, it is the medical staff themselves who prefer to regard the patient as guilty rather than sick. What is the unpalatable truth is that hospitals and clinicians themselves cause, however unwittingly, the phenomenon of the factitious patient. Medicine with its sophisticated diagnostic apparatus and, more importantly, its caring and dedicated staff, supplies the factitious patient's emotional needs. This care becomes as addictive as a drug like Valium or Prozac, but the difference is that such 'victims' of enthusiastic over-prescribing are treated sympathetically. The hospital provides substitute compassion, attention and protection, all of which would not be necessary if the factitial patient had existing, adequate social supports. Unfortunately for the patient, she or he is typically regarded as pitiable and pathetic.

Charcot, we may recall, saw hysteria as a clinical problem only when it occurred in women. In other words, the 'problem' of hysteria *is* femininity. When Jules Falret demonized the performance of the hysteric, he, like Charcot, represented hysteria as the dis-ease men feel about women. As Roy Porter has remarked: "hysteria was a condition chiefly rendered visible by the medical presence."[24] Charcot and his colleagues acted as the hysterics' agents just as much as their physicians. They authorized their symptoms and encouraged them to perform in public. The majority of Charcot's hysterics were working-class, and several of them shot to fame as hysteria became simultaneously popular entertainment and pioneering psychiatric research. In nineteenth-century Paris, hysteria emerged from domestic containment and institutionalized seclusion in the

asylum, and entered public space. It would be debatable whether this constituted liberation for hysterics, but it would also be pessimistic to suggest that they were completely victimized by Charcot and his colleagues.

If Charcot's stranglehold on the Salpétrière can be described as 'the golden age of hysteria,' it should also be recognized that the professional rewards reaped by Charcot and his peers would not have been possible without the assent of the hysterics themselves. While it is true that some of these women were abused and exploited, they also benefitted from the arrangement, which should be understood as a symbiotic, rather than parasitical, one. The women would have received emotional as well as material rewards, and they would have been aware that these things would not be available to them if they were not hysterics. It might be difficult for us to envisage a situation where illness itself, or the deliberate dissimulation of illness, might be socially advantageous. But we need to recognize the potential for such transactions within cultures. As Feldman and Ford comment in their Preface: "What is it like to live the fantasy and bask in concern and love from others, some of whom would never show such emotions toward us if we weren't 'ill'? Probably not what you would imagine."[25]

Situating hysteria and factitious disorder within an iatrogenic economy makes it unnecessary to establish whether genuine illness or feigning of symptoms comprises the 'truth' of an individual case. The fact that nineteenth-century alienists and physicians seem obsessed with exposing the hysteric's sins, and pursue this task with a (self)righteous zeal, leads us to ask what might be the ideological investment in such behaviour by physicians.

It appears that when the female hysteric is vilified, a process of

disavowal is taking place, where the physician distances himself from her 'antics' (the same ones which he induced and encouraged) and explicitly fashions himself in a paternalistic and strictly moral mode. He could thus study and disapprove of her behaviour at the same time, justified by patriarchal values which perceived pathological femininity as hardly different from normative femininity. This is an important point, which Freud apparently missed when he wondered why Charcot talked about "the genital thing" in private but refused to "say so" in public.[26] Charcot did not need to articulate the link between hysteria and female sexuality precisely because it was common knowledge amongst his peers.

When physicians diagnosed the 'inappropriate' woman as an hysteric, with her symptoms of emotional lability, histrionism, dependency and flamboyant behaviour, it was ironic that she was only *too* appropriate an example of feminine behaviour as it was perceived to be. By demonstrating his mastery of the hysteric in the therapeutic situation, the physician artificially disrupts the dialogic nature of hysteria, masking his role in creating its symptoms. The concept of the 'pretend' hysteric in the nineteenth century was an object lesson on the badness of women, in general as well as in particular, and it was concerned with the regulation of women's disordered minds and bodies by those who were patriarchs first and physicians second.

The somatization of female experience that constitutes the medical construction of hysteria reveals the male assumption that women *only* communicate through and across their bodies. As Charcot's furious reaction to any hysteric who interrupted his demonstrations show, the hysterical body was not meant to speak for itself. It was a surface across which strange and inexplicable motions and gestures

flickered, which could only be rendered comprehensible through the physician's intervention. He translated and codified these bodily manifestations into symptoms. Therefore, as a syndrome, hysteria came into existence because women's bodies were, to use Janet Beizer's term, "ventriloquized" by male physicians.[27]

Bad Daughters & Surrogate Fathers: Hysteria as the Dis-Ease of the Dysfunctional Family

The containment of woman's agency by constructing the language of the body as her sole mode of articulacy can be linked with the paternalistic role of the physician. In Bernard de Mandeville's satire *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysteric Passions* (1711), the relationship between a dysfunctional family and the doctor treating its ills is explored. The text is in the form of a dialogue, mostly between Misomedon, a hypochondriac, whose wife suffers from the 'vapours' or melancholy and whose daughter is an hysteric, and Philopiro, the physician. The parents, who seem to have tried numerous apothecaries' preparations, are unimpressed by Philopiro's holistic treatments for nervous complaints. Polytheca, Misomedon's wife, protests about the popular notion that nervous illness in women amounts to no more than a "malicious Mood," and argues that physicians' frustrations at dealing with an intractable syndrome where the evidence of disease is absent compounds the alienation she suffers as a *femina non grata*. She complains:

> I never dare speak of Vapours, the very Name is become a Joke; and the general Notion the Men have of them, is, that they are nothing but a malicious Mood, and contriv'd Sullenness of

willful, extravagant and imperious Women, when they are denied, or thwarted in their unreasonable Desires; nay, even Physicians, because they cannot cure them, are forced to ridicule them in their own Defence, and a Woman, that is really troubled with Vapours, is pitied by none, but her unhappy Fellow-sufferers, that labour under the same Affliction.[28]

If Polytheca is primarily a victim of a debilitating affliction, she also experiences secondary victimization in the form of public ridicule and the strategy of disapproval resorted to by physicians in their attempts to appear professionally competent when in fact they are baffled. The absence of a causal signature for nervous disorder within the body, which problematizes medical intervention, enables a substitution whereby the patient herself becomes the object of the physician's discontents. Polytheca describes how the popular imagination conceives of female nervous complaints as a humorous, but no less damning, caricature of women's sensibilities. Confronted with this degree of absolute disapproval and ridicule, Polytheca is unable to speak about her suffering.

What is explicit in Mandeville's text is that a gendering of nervous conditions is in operation, which perpetuates the disempowerment of women sufferers whilst privileging melancholy and hypochondria as specifically intellectual, masculine afflictions. Hypochondria was the male equivalent to the 'woman's disease' of hysteria, a distinction which came about during the seventeenth century.[29] Misomedon notes that cases of women hysterics far outnumber those of male hypochondriacs. He asks Philopiro what causes hysteria, given that hypochondria in men is caused by mental exhaustion. He remarks that "studying and intense thinking are not to

be alleg'd as a Cause in Women."[30]

In his reply, Philopiro adds to the theory of a uterine pathology factors of diet, sedentary lifestyle and lack of exercise. He reinforces the notion of feminine imbecility, pointing out that: "They are unfit, both for abtruse and elaborate Thoughts, all Studies of Depth, Coherence and Solidity, that fatigue the Spirits and require a Steadiness and Assiduity of thinking." But Philopiro admits that it is possible for an educated woman to exceed men in: "Sprightliness of Fancy, Quickness of Thought and off-hand Wit."[31] He believes that women's diets are most commonly to blame for cases of hysteria, "in which the Generality of [women] commit so many Errors."[32] The distinction between male and female habitual behaviour is obvious: the consequences of women's dietary 'whims' are pathological; whereas in men, nervous exhaustion has gratifying ascetic associations. While not exactly healthful, it demonstrates the positive attributes of intellect and conscientiousness associated with masculinity.

The compensations of hypochondria and melancholy for men are further revealed in Misomedon's comments about his illness. He recalls one occasion when he was "devoured with Grief even to Death," when he was approached by an acquaintance in the street, who Misomedon, with a degree of resentment excessive even for the invalid he presents himself as, describes as "a healthy Rascal full of Ease and Wantonness." The man, smiling sarcastically, enquired after Misomedon's "*Hypo*," causing Misomedon to contemplate attacking him.[33] Philopiro points out that patients with nervous conditions tend to be obsessed by their illness and disinclined to believe that anyone could suffer more than they. He advises Misomedon: "I would have you believe that your Lady's Distemper ought to be as seriously

treated...as your own, without medling with the Degrees of Misery in either." Misomedon's reply is unintentionally ironic:

> You are in the right: I verily believe my Distemper has strangely perverted my Humour; otherwise there is not a more tender Husband than my self, in the main. And as to Compassion in my Nature, I am *infima Auricula mollior* [softer than the tip of the ear].[34]

What Misomedon's reply shows is that his 'unreasonable' behaviour, such as his self-obsession and irritability, is culturally sanctioned in a way that his wife's and (unnamed) daughter's are not. The masculine variants of nervous complaints, hypochondria and melancholy, constitute a privileged form of male expression, where even those symptoms which might connote weakness or passivity could be recuperated within an economy of male power. Therefore, in men, nervous complaints were guarantees of the creative, cerebral, ethical and moral patriarch. The worst that could be said of him was that he was sensitive, or that he had over-exerted himself, but these were not criticisms. Rather, the hypochondriac or melancholic was exceptional, an overachiever. Hypochondria, as an implicitly masculine disorder, does not disrupt Misomedon's domination of his family, but rather legitimizes his narcissism as being concomitant with patriarchal power. There is no cultural mandate to compel Misomedon to treat his wife and daughter with compassion.

While Polytheca experiences a sense of dislocation from her suffering, since her illness is too fully in the public domain for her to be able to recuperate it within her personal subjectivity, Misomedon is much less 'paralysed' by his hypochondria. Misomedon's

self-absorption is scarely dented by public opinion, as his encounter with his healthy acquaintance suggests. He is certainly no apologist. Whereas Polytheca appears to have internalized the negative public image of women's nervous complaints, which she can barely contest so long as she exists in a condition of inarticulate stasis.

This demonstrates a curiously 'healthful' ostentation displayed by men with nervous illness, who seem to be more than adequately emotionally compensated by the flattering masculinity of their condition and are, paradoxically, invigorated by it. Writing about the sixteenth century, Juliana Schiesari describes the male melancholy exemplified by Hamlet as "an *accredited pathology*" (italics author's emphasis).[35] For men, then, these "accredited" nervous disorders enhanced and enabled their masculinity; whereas for women, nervous illness had exactly the opposite effect: it was profoundly *disabling*.

In Mandeville's text, Misomedon is eager to marry his daughter off, as he has heard that marriage is an effective cure for hysteria. Philopiro counsels him against this idea, showing some sympathy towards the hysteric's plight, while still seeing her as a commodity within the terms of marriage deals between men: she won't be worth exchanging if she is a liability to the strength of the male line. He notes: "[Marriage] may but half cure the Woman, who lingring under the Remainder of her Disease, may have half a dozen Children, that shall all inherit it."[36]

But despite the fact that in the fictional Philopiro, we have a reasonable and rational physician, who is capable of empathizing with the (under-represented) suffering of afflicted women, Misomedon's assumptions about marriage as a therapy for hysteria and

female melancholy are representative of early modern attitudes. Schiesari argues that the privileging of masculine nervous pathology as virtuous and positive convinces women melancholics that their suffering is meaningless. She argues:

> Far from being inspired to express themselves in some heightened artistic way, women melancholics--especially those who by lack of a husband are most alienated from phallic authority--lapse into utter inarticulateness and can no longer find a place in the symbolic order's prime system, language. Although, of course, both men and women can be depressed, the *discourse* of melancholia has historically designated a topos of expressibility for men and has accordingly given them a means to express their sorrows in a less alienated way, while relegating women to an inexpressive babble whose only sense (at least for the doctors of melancholy) is their need for a good man.[37]

Unlike Philopiro, many physicians assumed the role of the surrogate father by prescribing marriage for women hysterics and melancholics. This practice perpetuates the notion of woman's dependent, infantile nature, which was necessarily disordered and pathological in the absence of the moral surveillance provided by a forceful husband.

As we have seen, medical constructions of hysteria from the early modern period to the nineteenth century were dependent upon a rigid and static conceptualization of the female body. Predicated upon this body was a notion of the 'alien` embodied language of pathological femininity, which could be deciphered by the trained

physician. If he could translate this chaotic and disturbing language, he could treat and 'normalize' the hysteric's ills. The fact that the hysteric or vaporous body was subject to such intense scrutiny that it passed into the cultural imagination as a by-word for the vagaries of femininity contributed, as we saw in Polytheca's case, to the silencing of afflicted women. Women's nervous complaints lacked cultural prestige: while in men, melancholy was *aspirational* (that is, it signified a high degree of achievement in normative masculinity, and thus valorized that masculinity), women were unable to recuperate the nervous disorders they suffered from in anything like such a positive fashion.

The relationship between the body and feminine language is therefore a circular one: the assumption that women are presumed to speak only through their bodies produces an intrusive and aggressive policing of the female body, which leads to the erosion of women's ability to contest their somatization by using language to move beyond the body. As we have seen, hysteria was represented as a 'natural' consequence of women's bodies, which, insofar as they were flawed, were *naturally* imperfect.

In the nineteenth century, it became expedient for psychoanalysis to concretize hysteria in terms of the 'naturalness' of sexual difference. As Elisabeth Bronfen has noted, psychoanalysis "fails before the hysteric and must close its discussion of femininity by posing Woman as the great enigma, the 'dark continent'". It had to do this, she argues, because the theory of sexual identity rested upon the possession (or not) of the phallus, and no alternative mode of identity existed or could be imagined.[38] As Stephen Heath has commented, within the terms of such a scheme, "the woman can only be 'the woman,' *different from*." If hysteria is read only as an issue of

sexual difference, its subversive resonance will be suppressed:

> To explain hysteria by the problem of sexual identity is to miss the struggle in female hysteria against *that* assumption of difference, against *that* identity, is to refind hysteria as a nature of women and not the site of resistance-nothing to do with an essence-in culture.[39]

Historically, hysteria has been read 'in translation.' The technicians at the Salpétrière created a spectacle of Charcot's commanding voice and presence, ensuring that the audience never got to hear the hysterics' real voices and their own accounts of what their bodies were manifesting. But attempts at eroticizing the body of the hysteric never completely succeeded in suppressing female agency. Hysteria possesses the ability to escape from the edifices erected to contain it and emerge at the interstices of culture. In its ability to mimic that culture, hysteria reveals a latent potential for subversion and contestation. As the object that psychoanalysis repressed, hysteria returns despite efforts to theorize what is troubling about it out of existence.

In this chapter, I have been discussing the nineteenth-century appropriation of hysteria, which reduced the hysteric's body to the status of a blank page upon which the alienist could inscribe his text. What can interest scholars of seventeenth-century female prophecy about the history of hysteria is what it compels us to reconsider with regards to performance, textuality and authorship. Twentieth-century feminist criticism has recuperated the hysteric's voice by unsettling the putative 'therapeutic' relationship in which the male alienist's or analyst's interpretation went uncontested,

thus opening up space for the meanings that hysteria has for the woman whose body manifests symptoms. Thus, interpretation has shifted from perceiving hysteria as *idiomatic* of female pathology, to regarding it as an *idiolect*, through which an individual woman can express her own experiences.

***Écriture Féminine*, Language & Hysteria: Beyond Psychopathography**

Exemplifying this shift in attitudes is the way that the French feminist theory of *écriture feminine* (the discussion of women's writing) has valorized Dora, the analysand of Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. Dora's real name was Ida Bauer. She was brought to Freud by her father, Philip Bauer, suffering from hoarseness, coughing fits and depression. Philip Bauer had had an affair with Frau K. for six years, the K.s being friends of the Bauer family. Dora's mother apparently suffered from 'housewife's psychosis,' having a pathological fear of dirt and filling most of her time with housework. Dora regarded her with contempt. She alleged that Herr K. had made sexual advances to her, when she was aged fourteen, which she reacted to by slapping his face. Her father refused to believe this had really taken place, insisting that it was a fantasy on Dora's part. He was the dominant and very controlling parent, who dictated Dora's behaviour.

Dora knew about her father's affair and felt that she had been handed over to Herr K. "as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife; and her rage at her father's making such a use of her was visible behind her affection for him."[40] Freud found Dora a somewhat recalcitrant patient, and felt that she was trying to stall the progress of the analysis. He seems oblivious to

the fact that Dora could only interpret being taken to a psychotherapist with the injunction: "Please try and bring her to reason" as a continuation of her father's selfish manipulation of her.[41] As Jeffrey Masson notes: "She felt conspired against. She was conspired against. She felt lied to. She was lied to. She felt used. She was used."[42]

Freud saw Dora for about three months during the Autumn and Winter of 1900. Dora terminated the analysis, prematurely and spitefully, in Freud's view. He wrote up the case history early the following year. Dora unequivocally rejected Freud's theories about her hysteria, which suggested that she was jealous of Frau K. usurping herself in her father's affections. Freud argued that, far from being revolted by Herr K., Dora was actually in love with him. Freud did not regard Dora as a victim of abuse. He argued that responding to sexual advances with revulsion was grounds for "without question consider[ing] a person hysterical...whether or no the person were capable of producing somatic symptoms." Freud utterly rejected the notion that the hysteric could be unknowing about sexual matters: "where hysteria is found there can no longer be any question of 'innocence of mind' in the sense in which parents and educators use the phrase."[43]

Although Dora's affection for Frau K. was obvious, Freud noting that this indicated homoerotic desire on Dora's part, he continued to press her to accept that her heterosexual desire for Herr K. had the greatest bearing on her condition. He wanted Dora to accept Herr K. as a suitor, in accordance with her father's wishes. Freud was to admit: "I failed to discover in time and to inform the patient that her homosexual (gynaecophilic) love for Frau K. was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life." He quotes Dora as saying:

"Men are so detestable that I would rather not marry. That is my revenge."[44]

Dora's declaration that she intends to remain independent of men is represented as pathological. Again, Freud interpreted Dora's rejection of her role as the custodian of the Bauer's and the K.'s marital infidelities as revengeful. Dora informed all the adults that she knew what was happening, and then took her leave of both families. Freud learned this when Dora returned for the last time. He characterized her behaviour in this final meeting as insincere, duplicitous and manipulative. She asked for his help, but he doubted she meant it. Freud never credited Dora with any intelligence, and it seems not to have occurred to him that Dora was attempting to liberate herself from the claustrophobic confines of her family, and her dominating father in particular. Dora enacted the protofeminist struggle of the post-Victorian New Woman, portrayed in such novels as H.G. Wells' *Ann Veronica* (1909), who sought education and opportunities besides marriage. But such aspirations were deplored by Freud, whose therapy was geared towards re-domesticating the wayward Dora by persuading her to accept Herr K.

Ida Bauer married in 1903, a year after she saw Freud for the last time. She married an unsuccessful composer whom Philip Bauer had employed; his life was blighted by ill health and they had one child, a son. Ida died in 1945 of cancer of the colon. Twenty-four years after Freud's analysis, in 1922, Felix Deutsch was asked for his opinion on a case of Ménières syndrome, the symptoms of which include tinnitus and dizziness. He recognized the patient as 'Dora.' In the course of the consultation, Ida Bauer 'flirted' with Deutsch and launched into a tirade against men in general. She talked at length about her life history and her illnesses in particular. From an

informant, Deutsch obtained further information about the final years of Ida's life and the fate of her family. The informant informed Deutsch that Ida was "one of the most detestable hysterics" it had ever been his misfortune to meet.[45] Ida Bauer had evidently not lost her remarkable ability to alienate any male physician she was seen by.

What is most obvious from Freud's case history is the absence of Dora's voice. She never became a subject, but only the object of Freud's text. The fact that the case history, as a didactic and theoretical form of psychopathography, to a certain extent assimilates the characteristics of literature and may even come close to resembling it has virtually become a commonplace of which Freud himself was aware. On the one hand, he insisted upon protecting the anonymity of his patients and their families because he was aware that some unethical physicians used a case history not to further their clinical knowledge, "but as a *roman à clef* designed for their private delectation."[46] On the other, Freud reserved the right to disregard anything the patient might say which opposed the intended trajectory of his analysis. Thus he claimed of Dora's negative responses to his interpretations: "If this 'No,' instead of being regarded as the expression of an impartial judgement (of which, indeed, the patient is incapable), is ignored, and if work is continued, the first evidence soon begins to appear that in such a case 'No' signifies the desired 'Yes.'[47]

Evelyne Keitel has persuasively argued that psychoanalytic case histories are 'concord fictions,' a term coined by Frank Kermode in 1966. He notes that: "Fictions, whose ends are consonant with origins, and in concord, however unexpected, with their precedents, satisfy our needs."[48] For Freud, who described psychoanalysis in

terms of an archaeological metaphor (as we saw above), nothing should be allowed to obstruct the imperative of 'bringing to light,' not even and *especially* the patient.[49] Freud was convinced that had Dora not broken off the analysis, in time he would have reached a full understanding of her neurosis and its causes.

The analyst's task is to reconstruct a coherent narrative from the deliberate and unconscious dissimulations, omissions and lacunae which characterize the hysteric's story. But Freud's 'triumph' was achieved at Dora's expense. She is portrayed less as a patient who was possibly delusional and more as a disingenuous girl whose defences Freud penetrated. The reiteration of Dora's resistance only serves to put into greater relief Freud's achievement and affirm the appropriateness of the excavation metaphor in psychoanalysis. Freud's dominant analytical strategy was to assume that he understood the meaning of his patients' resistance.

The consequences of this for Dora are starkly illustrated by Kim Morrissey's play version of *Fragment of an Analysis*, entitled *Dora: A Case of Hysteria*. Freud delivers his case history to the audience. In his splicing of raconteur delivery together with intellectual weight, he apes Charcot. Dora, despite being present on the stage, is as powerless to influence what is said about her as the Salpétrière hysterics who 'forgot' that their role was a silent one. When Dora tries to speak, she receives the sharp retort: "This is my lecture, young lady. Not yours..."[50] *Fragment of an Analysis* was never Dora's story, it was Freud's. It tells us more about Freud, in terms of his assumptions about sexual difference, than it ever could about his patient.

One of the reasons why Dora's case history is still being read is due to the reclaiming of this hysteric as a feminist heroine. Dora's

'case' has been re-opened precisely because of the absence of the 'real' Dora, whose voice has been erased from the contemporary representations of her experiences. Feminists argue that the text of 'Dora' has finally been recognized as a defining moment in feminist history. As Claire Kahane puts it:

> contemporary feminists are reclaiming hysteria as the dis-ease of women in patriarchal culture. *Dora* is thus no longer read as merely a case history or a fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria but as an urtext in the history of women, a fragment of an increasingly heightened critical debate about the meaning of sexual difference and its effects on the representations of feminine desire.[51]

'Dora' raises questions about sexual difference and the social construction of femininity which are of particular interest to feminist theorists. The encoding of Dora's desire as inappropriate and pathological overdetermines her diagnosis as a hysteric. There is quite literally no other role available to her. The text exposes myths about gender roles and the mechanisms of patriarchal control which Philip Bauer, Herr K. and Freud invoke in an attempt to inhibit the intra-familial turbulence created by Dora's insurrection.

The Cult of Saint Dora: Hysteria, Resistance, Abjection

As we have seen, discussions about the hysteric seem often unable to progress beyond the personal level. Just as physicians could not conceal their derogatory attitudes towards their "repellent" patients, the very fact that feminists want to identify with Dora has

meant that it is difficult for them to distance themselves from her. The debate between Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément in their book *The Newly Born Woman* considers the issue of the hysteric's ability to mobilize her symptoms and use them to disrupt the patriarchal systems which surround her. Is her suffering self-defeating or a source of subversive power? Cixous found herself "fascinated" by Dora, of whom she admiringly says: "here was an eighteen-year-old girl caught in a world where you say to yourself, she is going to break-a captive, but with such strength!"[52] The hysteric is "the typical woman in all her force." She confronts abusive men with the reality of their abuse. She defies hypocrisy by reiteration, by refusing to be a silent witness to male exploitation. For Cixous, the hysteric is "the nuclear example of women's power to protest."[53]

Conversely, Clément is more pessimistic about the subversiveness of the hysteric. Although she is ostensibly 'noisy,' she actually remains uncommunicative. Within the Lacanian terminology which Clément appropriates, the hysteric never passes fully into the realm of the Symbolic but remains within the Imaginary. In other words, she is isolated from culture and her potential to disrupt cultural systems is disabled. She never engages with language, which would enable her to progress from the status of object to that of a subject. Because the language of the hysteric is a private one, Clément argues, it immobilizes the hysteric. She asserts: "the hysteric does *not* write, does *not* produce, does nothing-nothing other than make things circulate without inscribing them." Meanwhile: "The master is there. He is the one who stays on permanently. He publishes writings."[54] The hysteric can only affect the cultural system which contrives to perpetuate her symptomology by rupturing this stasis and becoming a subject.

Cixous and Clément are unable to agree about Dora *qua* hysteric. Clément implicitly suggests that her approach to Dora is more 'appropriate' when she accusingly remarks to Cixous: "you love Dora, but to me she never seemed a revolutionary character." Cixous retorts:"I don't give a damn about Dora, I don't fetishize her." She claims to imagine Dora as: "the name of a certain force," which cripples the "little circus" which she calls the abusive family.[55]

The debate between Cixous and Clément contests whether or not Dora constitutes a feminist heroine. This valorizing subtext poses the question as to exactly *what* this 'heroine' should constitute. Anna O. (the pseudonym for Bertha Pappenheim) has provided feminists with the paradigm for the 'successful' hysteric. She was treated by Freud's colleague, Joseph Breuer, for hysteria between 1880 and 1882. She recovered and become an active feminist and Germany's first social worker. The case of Anna O. suggests that hysteria and feminism can be regarded as parallel cultural phenomena, since the emergence of the New Woman and the suffragette movement coincided with the age of hysteria reaching its apogee. Therefore, both the hysteric and the suffragette could be understood as mobilizing their bodies into domestic and public spaces in order to protest against the repressive structures of patriarchy. Because Anna O. evolved from the role of the hysteric to that of feminist, hysteria could be posited as proto-feminism. Therefore, hysteria constitutes a primal stage in a woman's development into a subject, where language is embodied, private and consequently ineffectual in terms of communicating her desires.

If so, are we to conclude that Dora's case was one of arrested development? She showed potential as a New Woman by indicating that

she did not want to get married, but the historical record shows that she did, and it made her more embittered about men than ever. Unlike Anna O., Dora is not demonstrably a success story for feminism. What she could be a tragic victim. Elaine Showalter comments that the cult of "Saint Dora" the "martyr" does not facilitate women survivors of mental illness to produce testimony about their experiences.[56]

A victimology of Dora could justify the continuous reiteration of her story by feminists. It could also compensate for Dora's failure to recover something from her trauma by becoming a feminist, in other words to replicate Anna O's redemptive story. Toril Moi argues that our evaluation of Dora should not be based on the supposedly militant young woman who irritated Freud, but rather on what she became: "old, nagging, whining and complaining...achieving nothing." Moi argues that hysteria: "is not...the incarnation of the revolt of women forced to silence but rather a declaration of defeat, the realization that there is no other way out."[57]

Mark Micale has suggested that the feminist psychoanalytic theorists and deconstructionalist literary critics who contribute to the volume *In Dora's Case* (1985) are guilty of :"set[ting] out to do to Freud today what Freud did to Dora ninety years ago."[58] Even Dora herself may become a casualty of critics' revenge upon Freud on her behalf. The Dora of 1900 was assimilated into Freud's psychopathography; similarly, the Dora of the twentieth century has been assimilated into feminist literary theory. Critics endlessly debate Dora's character, her achievements or lack of them, the nature of our identification with her and the ethics of such identification. Dora is figured as either a victim or a saint, an equally totalizing representation as the alienist's typically negative appraisal of the hysteric. Dora is not adequate to the role of figurehead for the

feminist, psychoanalytic and literary criticism industry which has invested in her name. This is precisely because once her 'recovery' from Freud has been expedited, by dint of theoretical deconstruction, it becomes apparent that the 'real' Dora is either insubstantial or nonexistent. Both Dora's hysteria as a clinical condition and Viennese reality as she lived it have been erased from the surviving records, the one because Freud's conclusions had to be entirely rejected in order to exonerate Dora, the other because it is simply impossible to determine from the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. The fictionality of this case history should alert us to our own fictions, our reimagining of Dora to suit our own theories. We should not ask whether such fictions are either true or false, but rather what their function is. For Freud, Dora was a subject on which he could test and vindicate his theories. For feminists, Dora is situated within an interdisciplinary debate about sexual difference and the place of women within culture which insists upon the contemporaneity of Dora's relevance. But the 'real' Dora is as elusive as ever.

Hysterical Voices: Gender, Authorship & Textuality

The debate over 'Dora' might be regarded as something of a discursive cul-de-sac, reductionist in its exclusively nineteenth-century discussion of hysteria and having little or no relevance to women's experiences of mental illness in the twentieth century. Despite these significant problems, feminist literary criticism provides us with a useful interpretative framework for conceptualizing hysteria in terms of texts, authors and readers. Evelyne Keitel has argued that the explicitly literary qualities of

case histories ensures their plausibility, since a dialogic reading process is set up whereby the reader compensates for any lapses in the integrity of the theoretical argument. She writes: "only those case histories which are firmly rooted in the tradition of literary modernism carry out their didactic intention of convincing their readers by their arguments."[59]

Analysing how a non-literary text employs literary devices alerts us to the text's ideological function. It also indicates to us that literary theory should not be confined to strictly 'literary' texts, a point of particular relevance for prophetic texts, which are, like Freud's psychopathographies, another kind of 'theoretical' text. We can understand hysteria as simultaneously a performance of a text and the text itself, which is also how I want to conceptualize prophecy.

Although it is neither possible nor appropriate to resolve the ambivalence concerning the way that Dora has been appropriated by physicians and subsequently critics, we can extract from this complex discussion the issue of the hysteric as author and agent, of hysteria as an authorial strategy. Because she both mimics and contests established cultural forms, the hysteric oscillates between subjectivity and the status of an object/abject. Therefore, some space exists for her to create a discursive space which can potentially resist patriarchal structures even as it appears to conform to them. This sense of negotiation and duplicity can be perceived in prophecy, and has particular resonance in terms of gender. In *Woman: The Longest Revolution*, Juliet Mitchell suggests how, in the act of writing, the woman as author appropriates the voice of the hysteric.[60] As Elisabeth Bronfen explains:

> To postulate a hysterical voice...implies that the woman writer

> has once again moved away from writing exclusively with her body, with the narratives produced merely commenting on her body-text; that she has moved back to language, to the production of symbolic texts.

Bronfen acknowledges that 'hysteria' in the clinical sense is outmoded, but retains it because she wants to "highlight the issue of duplicity."[61] She stresses the doubleness of hysteria as critical to understanding how it interacts with culture. In the same way, the ambivalence produced by the woman prophet can be elucidated by perceiving her role as an author as hysterical. As simultaneously transcendent and embodied, subversive and conservative, female prophecy negotiates the construction of the gendered body within early modern religion and the wider culture. The function of interpretation should be to reconstitute the complex elements which comprise prophecy as it is experienced and transmitted within religious, political and social spheres.

The remainder of this chapter will consider several events within seventeenth-century culture whose provenance was open to question and could be appropriated as 'hysterical' or 'prophetic.' I argue that our reading of these histories must maintain this tension, by representing such events as texts whose meaning was ambiguous and contested by multiple self-interested observers. As cultural phenomena, both hysteria and prophecy constitute texts in which 'readers' participate equally as much as narrators or protagonists, particularly in the process by which the phenomenon is defined (as witchcraft, hysteria or divine) and becomes comprehensible.

Media Circuses: Interpreting the Prodigious in Early Modern

England.

It is a relatively simple matter to reconstruct the milieu of the Salpétrière during Charcot's heyday in the nineteenth century. A wide range of testimonials, sketches, photographs and lithographs are available to the historian. The visual material, in particular, has created a commonplace of the 'theatre of hysteria' with its coached performers. As I have previously suggested, privileging the Victorian period as an exemplary model in which to study the manufacture and consumption of the cultural phenomena defined as 'hysteria' overlooks the creation of parallel 'media circuses' around prodigious or anomalous manifestations in seventeenth-century English culture. It also wrongly suggests that the deployment of theatricality in order to persuade and compel an audience was an innovation of Charcot's clinical practice.

Controversy between religious and scientific or medical institutions is ignited whenever they collide over an 'issue' where the beliefs of each are perceived to be at stake, such as demonic possession. Historically, the relationship between religion and science has been troubled. If one assumes that in Charcot's time science's supremacy was inevitable and unresisted, then the corollary to this would be diminished friction between the scientific and religious establishments. But advances in medicine and science exacerbated rather than terminated animosity between the two parties, whose difficulties primarily rose from the fact that they were not mutually exclusive. Nor, indeed, should we posit science and religion as two monolithic entities unriven by internal divisions and disputes. This is especially important for seventeenth-century England, where what we might perceive as

religious pluralism was experienced as explicit and violent animosity between religious groups. For the early modern and Victorian periods alike, it should be noted that a glance backwards into history can give the erroneous impression that religious belief has been gradually displaced by science.

What *can* be claimed is that advocates of either establishment were eager to gain the ascendency by refuting the beliefs and principles of their opponents. Cristina Mazzoni has noted that in the nineteenth century, the physician was replacing the priest in the holistic care of souls and minds. This cultural shift led to the pathologizing of the more extreme forms of religiosity, such as mysticism, mortification of the body and ecstacy.[62]

Charcot's revisionist interpretation of the iconography of feminine mysticism and ecstacy, *Les démoniaques dans l'art* (1886), constitutes an ambitious attempt to hystericize and thus dissipate the power of the saintly female body. The book was a collaboration between Charcot and Paul Richer, a graphic artist and professor of artistic anatomy. Mazzoni comments that, as readers of the book, "we witness the forced metamorphosis of religious metaphors into scientific ones and the attempted appropriation by psychiatric discourse of an entire iconographic tradition even as its supernatural content is repressed."[63]

What is perhaps most remarkable about Charcot's book is that, far from discarding the paraphernalia of the Christian tradition, he incorporates some of its terminology and metaphors into his psychiatric interpretation. Notable among these is his use of stigmata, a term which signifies the manifestation of the wounds of Christ's passion and also were areas of the skin rendered insensitive by sexual intercourse with the devil.[64] Charcot defines stigmata as

"pathognomic signs" which "speak" of disease in a patient.

Thus, Charcot did not want to jettison the *examples* upon which the Christian tradition was based, for which the images of the mortified bodies of women saints and mystics constituted formidable proof of its validity and authenticity. Instead, by annexing religious belief he co-opts the women's bodies for psychiatry, to provide psychiatry with a historical tradition and thus a reassuring credibility. By providing an alternative mode of explicating the behaviour of women-in-the-past, Charcot emphasizes the redundancy of religious belief, its inadequacy when contrasted with rigorous scientific method. In the *Studies on Hysteria* (1893), Freud and Breuer include among those cases of hysterical phenomenon where patients have intentionally repressed a traumatic event: "hysterical deliria in saints and nuns."[65]

Charcot cannot be credited with inventing the pathologizing assault upon religion, since many had attempted it before him. But he was the first to demonstrate how medicine could provide a scientific framework which could be deployed in order to poach the means by which Christianity substantiated itself. Charcot, giving full vent to his anticlericism, envisaged himself as initiating a process by which medicine would eventually supersede theology. The 'examples' or cases by which a system of ideas and beliefs authenticates itself are the spoils of ideological war between opposing institutions.

Demonic possession, hysteria, trance states, prophecy and ecstacy: all such practices are characterized by an *absence*, where some form of manifestation is alleged to have occurred. Inevitably, investigations occur after the event and their task is to piece together evidence and testimony in order to create a probable explanation which substitutes for what is missing from the enquiry,

which is precisely the 'happening' itself. It is therefore not surprising that seventeenth-century controversies over cases of possible hysteria, prophecy or demonic possession took place within a legal or quasi-legal context.

The role of texts in these cases is pivotal: within them are contained detailed narratives of events, legal depositions and the professional testimony of physicians, clerics and other respected members of the community. The texts served as a non-legal record of events concerning the cases and listed the people who were involved with them. Unlike legal records, they were obviously more accessible to a literate public. The debate was therefore made available to a wider audience, beyond the local community in which the event occurred. These texts cannot claim to be either objective or disinterested, many being written by individuals who have a vested interest in persuading the reader to adopt their specific interpretation of events. The text attempts to transform an actual body which is manifesting the prodigious and capable of being inscribed with multiple meanings, into a discursive body, contained *within* the text, which inhibits the proliferation of meaning.

Cultural phenomena like hysteria and demonic possession are mediated through language, and by attending to language and textual production we can establish the complex interplay between protagonists, intermediaries and audiences which defines and authenticates the phenomena. In 1625, Eleanor Davies, husband of Sir John Davies, heard about a thirteen-year-old Scottish boy named George Carr, whose uncanny abilities at prognostication had made him temporarily the talk of London. Davies describes in her account *The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal* (1646), how she and her husband were intrigued by Carr and invited him to their house. Davies explains how

someone:

> would take the Bible or a Chronicle, and open it, close it again, then cause the aforesaid Youth to shew by signs and such like dumb demonstrations, what was containd therein; which things he so to the life exprest and acted, as it were a Psalm or Verse then feigned to sing, though saw not a letter of the Book; and sometime that suddenly behinde him would blow a Horn, whereat never so much as changed his look, seemed so hard of hearing.[66]

Carr, despite his inability to speak, could also guess the names of strangers and how many peppercorns were hidden inside a box. Davies provides us with an account of public opinion about George Carr, and how she chose to disregard it in taking him into her house and treating him as an aid sent by God, through which she channelled and elaborated her spiritual practice. The 'trials' of Carr were a public affair, which respected London divines attended, some of whom gave Carr a shilling "without further consideration":they were diverted by his abilities but did not perceive him as a threat to religious belief. Other ministers intimated that the Davies should by no means be providing a roof for the boy. They accused him of being: "a Vagrant, a Counterfeit, or a Witch."[67]

To Eleanor Davies, Carr is definitely not a party-piece to be discarded once her friends had been moderately amused by his 'antics.' He enabled her to concentrate upon matters of religiosity, and, "laying aside household cares all," she undertook intensive study of the scriptures, particularly the book of Daniel.[68] Davies's response to Carr could be attributed to a mid-life crisis,

precipitating her to question her life and the place of religion within it. She had lost two sons earlier in her marriage, and her beloved daughter Lucy had recently become married. Esther Cope interprets Davies's behaviour at the time she met George Carr within the context of E.Petroff's theory of psychic receptivity, where a second, visionary stage is characterized by feelings of concern for the spiritual welfare of others and auditory hallucinations. Davies would therefore have regarded the appearance of Carr as providential and as having special significance to her.[69] She was already reading Daniel at the time she met Carr. It is very likely that psychology played an important role in Davies's decision to become closely involved with Carr, but this cannot be separated from the public context in which Carr became suddenly and controversially visible.

In *The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal*, Davies makes an explicit connection between Carr and her own emergence as a prophet, which took the form of a vision of a heavenly voice instructing Davies to be "as the meek Virgin" at her Berkshire home of Englefield in July, 1625.[70] Predictably, Carr was blamed for bewitching his benefactress. He simultaneously regained the use of his voice and the loss of his prophetic abilities soon after Davies's prophetic career began. He deserted her and apparently went overseas.

As a prophet, Davies believed she was filled with the spirit of the prophet Daniel. It was not simply that pious contemplation in the presence of Carr sent her back to the text of Daniel with renewed vigour, but rather that her recognition of how the controversy over Carr increased once she became an active participant in it provided her with an opportunity to stage a Danielesque scenario of her own, where divine authority justified her defiance in the face of public opinion and invigorated her own religiosity, which had atrophied

following a succession of traumatic life experiences.

Davies's dramatic appropriation of Daniel does not invalidate her subsequent prophetic role or her sincere belief in God's providence. What it does tell us is that how seventeenth-century culture remarked upon the prodigious provided spectators with opportunites for intimate and involved roles in the process of interpretation which were potentially empowering and transforming, as in Davies's case. Attending to the psychological element of Davies's induction into prophecy should not mean that we overlook the cultural element. Her transgressive behaviour had a biblical precedent, but it was enabled by an economy of communal participation in the prodigious, providing Davies with an opportunity to violate gender norms.

The theatricality of prodigious events such as this might suggest that the protagonist was suspect or even fraudulent. But the decision to legitimize a particular reading of an event or individual was made on the basis of the assessment of the 'performance.' Because the process of authenticating a form of behaviour took place in the public arena, the behaviour (be it hysteria or demonic possession) had to be represented to the audience in a persuasive manner. In a culture where opposing views were incompatible and none successful in managing to supersede the others for very long, 'winning' a case such as George Carr's represented a considerable ideological advantage, albeit within a local context.

Those who were suspicious of Eleanor Davies's controversial relationship with George Carr probably justified their unease by citing the case of the Boy of Bilson in 1620. The first part of *The Boy of Bilson*, printed in 1622, reproduces the testimony of the Catholic priests who treated him, mainly by a man called Wheeler, who had attended many exorcisms. William Perry was a twelve year old boy from

Bilson in Staffordshire. He alleged that one day as he returned home from school, he met an old woman who criticized his manners and threatened him. Perry went home and began to suffer severe fits, during which it was a struggle to restrain him.

His family were persuaded that exorcism should be attempted. The convulsions became less severe, and Perry's body was anointed with holy water and oil. The priests departed and after this Perry worsened. He began to vomit pins, wool, rosemary and feathers. Wheeler returned and remarked that he was relieved the vomiting had occurred during the priests' absence, since it reinforced the validity of the Catholic rite of exorcism: "that well they might see that really they came from him, and that it was no collusion of vs." Left alone with Wheeler, Perry tells him about the witch who has afflicted him. Wheeler recalls: "shee would make an end of him...if it were not for me, whom she called a Roguish P."[71]

The exorcisms continue, with Perry recovering slightly only to relapse. Wheeler learns that a number of Puritans have visited Perry's bedchamber in his absence. Perry tells Wheeler he wishes his family and himself to become Catholics. His parents, however, are unwilling. Wheeler asks Mrs. Perry whether she will agree to convert: "shee answered, That she must consider of that: then said I, I am afraid this Childe will not haue help." Wheeler rebukes Mr. Perry who, out of desperation, seeks the help of "*Witches* and *Sorcerers*."[72]

At the close of his testimony, Wheeler assures the reader that he has surrendered his text to the scrutiny of three protestants, as well as William's parents, so that they might satisfy themselves of the accuracy and legitimacy of his account.[73]

Wheeler's account is followed by a narrative detailing the trial of the woman whom Perry claimed had bewitched him, and the subsequent

process by which Perry was exposed as a fraud planted by a mysterious Catholic conspiracy. On August 10, 1620, Joan Coxe stood trial at the Staffordshire Assizes before Sir Peter Warburton and Sir John Davies, the Justices for the Assizes. They were presented with:

> some slender circumstances, which were vulgarly esteemed strong proofes of *Witch-craft;* but after some speech, manifesting the idlenesse of such fantasticall delusions, the woman was freed by the Inquest.[74]

The judges decided that William Perry should be committed to the care of Thomas, the Lord Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield, who lived at Eccleshall Castle. The Bishop, though rarely at home, thought that Perry was counterfeiting. Upon observing that reading aloud the first verse from the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, &c.," caused Perry to have convulsions, the Bishop tricked him by reading the scripture in Greek. He went to his bed and informed him that the devil would recognize the scriptures in the Greek version. But if it was Perry who was abusing the scripture, he was warned that he would be discovered: "Wherefore looke to thy selfe, for now thou art to bee put vnto triall, and mark diligently whether it be that same Scripture which shall bee read vnto thee, at the reading whereof thou doest seeme to be so much troubled and tormented."[75] Perry failed the test, exhibiting spectacular convulsions throughout the Bishop's reading of the twelfth and first verses of John in the Greek.

The Bishop arranged for Perry to return home to his parents, but Perry complained he felt seriously ill. His urine was discovered to be black. Perry boasted to a servant that he was adding a black dye to his urine, and was caught doing this soon after. He confessed to the

Bishop his "vngracious and godlesse practices" with many tears and sincere remorse.[76]

On the 8th and 13th of October, 1620, William Perry was required to make public his admission of guilt at Eccleshall Castle. He confessed that he had been persuaded to fabricate demonic possession by an old man known only as Thomas, who seduced him with the words: "*If thou wilt doe as I shall teach thee, thou shalt not need to goe to schoole; for...I can teach thee such tricks and feats, that the people that see thee, shall beleeue that thou art bewitched, and so shall lament and pitty thee.*"[77] Thomas 'trained' his young charge in how to behave as if he were possessed. He relates how, during the exorcisms, the priest Wheeler bombarded him with papist propaganda. Wheeler promised him help if he agreed to convert. Perry admitted that he had intended to 'recover' as a result of the exorcisms, but delayed it because he enjoyed the attention he received as a demoniac.

The anonymous protestant author insists that Christians (by which he means protestants) should only be interested in the truth, in contrast to Catholic priests who manufacture lies. They "falsely" appropriate "*Apostolicall* power" in conducting exorcism rituals.[78] Perry attended the Assizes at Stafford on 26 July, 1621, to publically apologize to Joan Coxe and ask forgiveness for committing blasphemy and deception. The account ends: "And thus it pleased *God* to open the eyes of this *Boy*...with the clay of the Romish *Priests* lewd impostures; and...with the spittle of his owne infamy, to see his errors, and to glorifie the *God of truth.*"[79]

The humane treatment of the wrongly accused 'witch' Joan Coxe in *The Boy of Bilson* is possible because the text is addressing what is perceived as a far greater threat to protestant belief: the putative superstitious and occult practices of the Roman Catholic church. The

text sets out to expose Catholic credulity, by contrasting the 'gullible' Wheeler with the Bishop's sophisticated investigative skills, his ability to penetrate the almost flawless performance of William Perry, who was being invisibly coached by a Catholic conspirator. In addition, Coxe was a Catholic recusant, and this fact emphasizes that the Catholic conspiracy (and consequently all Catholic ritual) is fundamentally illogical and disorganized, as well as irreligious. Its inconsistencies become apparent when it is scrutinized by a righteous protestant, whereupon the entire theatrical edifice crumbles. In this case, the performance is an illusion.

Nicholas Spanos and Jack Gottlieb have noted that: "the demoniac's single most extensive source of information concerning role expectations was the exorcism procedure." They demonstrate that the role of the demoniac is highly attractive to socially powerless individuals because it affords considerable psychological and material benefits.[80] Such individuals tend to be passive character types whose subserviance is reinforced in the relationship between the exorcist and the demoniac. Although the convulsions can appear wildly out of control to observers, the demoniac "remained submissive to the exorcist. The exorcist commanded, the demoniac obeyed, and the power of God was thereby demonstrated."[81] To a contemporary audience, William Perry's vulnerability is not psychological but rather theological: he constitutes a weak point in protestantism, which was under attack from devious and ruthless papists. The fact that he is recruited as a Catholic agent while walking home alone and vulnerable outside of the religious cohesion and discipline of the protestant household directs the reader to interpret Perry as the unsuspecting individual who meets the devil in

the wood.

What is interesting about *The Boy of Bilson* is the decision to reproduce Wheeler's account without any editorial emendation. The reader's interpretation of this section of the text is not being proscribed. He or she is of course assumed to be protestant, but it appears as though it is the author's intention to allow his reader to be temporarily seduced by papism, only to shock him with conclusive evidence about the serious fraud and blasphemy that Roman Catholics have committed. The latter half of the text, then, is extremely precise in legal terms, recording William Perry's confessions and the fact that they occur in formal, public settings, as opposed to the secretive, insidious half-light in which papist plots are created.[82] The ostensible openness and honesty of *The Boy of Bilson* conceals the fact that it is carefully structured rhetoric, designed to convince the reader of the multifarious deviousness of the Roman Catholic church and the crucial need for their vigilance if the protestant faith is to survive.

The Boy Of Bilson records a triumph of English protestantism over the incursions of Roman Catholicism, and has plenty of legal evidence to substantiate its case. But the publication of Edward Jorden's *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called The Suffocation of the Mother* (1603) was the result of far less auspicious circumstances. Jorden was one of a number of physicians who gave evidence at the London trial of Elizabeth Jackson, a woman accused by the fourteen-year-old Mary Glover of bewitching her. Jorden argued that Glover was not a victim of possession, but he could not provide a conclusive medical explanation for her behaviour. The court, presided over by Sir Edmund Anderson, found in favour of Glover and Jackson was convicted. Jorden wrote *A Briefe Discourse* in an attempt to salvage his professional

reputation, which Judge Anderson had savaged in court, and provide scientific arguments proving that Glover really did suffer from hysteria.

In the *Epistle Dedicatorie*, Jorden laments the inferior status of the physician as a legal witness: "Why should we not prefer the iudgements of Phisitians in a question concerning the actions and passions of mans bodie (the proper subiect of that profession) before our owne conceites; as we do the opinions of Diuines, Lawyers, &c. in their proper Elements."[83] Jorden criticises the common weal, who misinterpret cases like Mary Glover's (to which he never actually refers to in name) and whose "vnlearned and rash conceits" he intends to vigorously contest. He writes that many Christians "as vngroundely as the Papists" are too eager "to drawe forth their wooden dagger, if they do but see a maid or woman suffering one of these fits of the Mother." Instead, Jorden counsels caution in attributing such "fits" to the miraculous or demoniac, as "impostures" are legion in seventeenth-century English society. Proof must be evinced before the observer should believe in a supernatural explanation.[84]

Jorden implicates a uterine pathology in the formation of hysterical symptoms, noting that woman's "passiue condition" increases her vulnerability to disease.[85] He reiterates the immense protean nature of hysteria. The corruption of the matrix or womb affects every other part of the body, including the senses. He also argues that hysteria affected the emotions, and that in some cases, emotional disturbance could be pathological. Jorden notes that: "seeing we are not maisters of our owne affections, wee are like battered Citties without walles, or shippes tossed in the Sea, exposed to all maner of assaults and daungers, euen to the ouerthrow

of our owne bodies."[86]

Jorden's text can be read as an example of scientific scepticism, a counter to superstition and credulous belief. But perhaps we should be wary of representing the Mary Glover as a debate between the institutions of 'religion' and 'science.' Michael MacDonald has persuasively argued that Jorden was not a disinterested sceptic, but was in fact commissioned to write his book by Bishop Bancroft. *A Briefe Discourse* therefore constitutes an ideological salvo in the Church of England's efforts to maintain its own authority and eradicate division. MacDonald notes: "The Church of England was being challenged from within and without by thaumaturgists who claimed to have the power to cast out devils, and its leaders had embarked upon a campaign to discredit and silence them."[87] Exorcism was being practiced by certain nonconformists, such as John Darrell during the 1590s, and Bancroft was determined to put an end to what he saw as subversive practices. Exorcism, no longer marginalized as a perverse and irreligious papist rite, was threatening the integrity of the Church.

In an era where print culture was increasingly being mobilized for ideological purposes, we should not be surprised that Jorden, who already had a motive for presenting the case for scientific incredulity after his embarrassing appearance in court, was recruited with a political agenda. Jorden definitely did not believe Glover was a victim of possession, but this did not mean he would be oblivious of the political import and possible advantages of his book. In the event, Jorden's participation in the debate over demonic possession, witchcraft and its medicalization as hysteria can be seen as encouraging scepticism, which in turn sanctioned the rise of science and medicine within early modern culture.

Mary Glover's fits were not solely reported during the trial. Whenever Elizabeth Jackson was brought into the girl's presence, Glover fell into convulsions and started raving. The court thus observed and participated in her affliction. Jackson was jailed for a year and Mary Glover began a process of intensive fasting and prayer, eventually recovering. This process is described in John Swan's *A Trve And Briefe Report, Of Mary Glovers Vexation, And of her deliuerance by the meanes of fasting and prayer* (1603), which inserts Glover's experience into a tradition of martyrdom and redemptive suffering. At the moment of her 'release' from the demons which have been tormenting her, Glover cries out: "*O Lord thou hast deliuered me*," these being the words spoken by her grandfather, a martyr of the Marian persecutions, before he died at the stake.[88]

The 'truth' of the matter is, of course, beyond recall. Jeffrey Boss is convinced that Glover was hysterical, citing the "involuntary" nature of some of her symptoms, such as the absence of the gagging reflex when Glover inserted her fingers deep into her own throat. He concludes that the symptoms of hysteria: "are unlikely to have been acted, in a strictly theatrical sense. Therefore, the account is probably at least partially about involuntary manifestations of Mary Glover's condition, and not wholly, if at all, about pretence."[89] So we are back to the debate over the individual hysteric's authenticity: and even when this can be established, it is done without any attention being given to the complicity of the culture in which the hysteria is manifested.

Modern theorists may credit themselves with the term of the 'culture-reactive syndrome,' which is commonly used with reference to twentieth-century psychopathologies like anorexia nervosa. But

as G.S. Rousseau has astutely pointed out, this term actually originates in the seventeenth century, where Thomas Sydenham (in Rousseau's words "the unacknowledged hero of hysteria") described a hysterical epidemic caused by cultural tensions and anxieties.[90] In the *Practice of Physick*, he wrote: "I am of [the] Opinion that as Fevers with their attendents, make two thirds of the Diseases which afflict Mankind; so Hysterical Distempers come up to half the other third part of those which we call Chronicall."[91]

As readers of texts which impose a supernatural or medical explanation of a prodigious event which has been manifested upon the body of an individual, we are less aware of long-term cultural shifts determining the dominance of religious or scientific hermeneutic metaphors. Instead, we become increasingly cognizant of the degree of contestation and debate which made occurrences of ecstacy, demonic possession and hysteria *political* events. The arguments themselves were transmitted through texts, which attempted to fix specific meanings to each event.

As participants and protagonists of their own experiences, women were confronted with a veritable babel of contesting voices, who saw their 'cases' as ones which could be used to promote their own professional and personal status. But this did not mean that women were disabled from manipulating their experiences to their own advantage, nor did it preclude their voices from being heard. As cultural phenomena, hysteria, prophecy and demonic possession were produced out of the relations between social agents and mediating institutions, but as categories, they offered flexible opportunities to individuals like Mary Glover to influence the interpretation of their experiences and perhaps benefit from this.

How did women's prophetic writing construct itself in relation to the wider culture? In the next chapter, I shall be looking at the relations between the Bible, hermeneutics and gender, assessing how women's scriptural exegesis enabled their access to wider religious roles, and investigating women's appropriation of religious language in prophetic texts.

Notes

1 Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (originally published in the U.S.A. by Turtle House Books, 1993; U.K. imprint London: Virago Press, 1995), p. 15.

2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1. An Introduction* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1979; reprinted 1990), p. 117.

3 Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 287.

4 Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (The University of Chicago, 1965; softcover edition New Jersey & London: Jason Aronson, 1993), p. 133.

5 The *Diagnotic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders'* criteria for the diagnosis of a somatoform disorder is: "the presence of physical symptoms that suggest a general medical condition (hence the term *somatoform*) and are not fully explained by a general medical condition...In contrast to Factitious Disorder and Malingering, the physical symptoms are not intentional i.e., under voluntary control. Somatoform Disorders differ from Psychological Factors Affecting Medical Condition in that there is no diagnosable general medical condition to fully account for the physical symptoms." *DSM-IV* (as it is known in "the trade") makes explicit the revised semantics of mental disorder by noting that somatization disorder is "historically referred to as hysteria or Briquet's Syndrome," *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-4;* fourth edition (Washington: The American Psychiatric Association,

1994), p. 445.

6 Robert Whytt, *Observations on the Nature, Causes and Cure of Those Disorders which have been Commonly Called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteric: To which are Prefixed some Remarks on the Sympathy of the Nerves* (Edinburgh, 1765, second edition), pp. 96-7.

7 Elaine Showalter, *Hystories. Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press; U.K. imprint London: Picador, 1997), p. 15.

8 Mark Micale, *Approaching Hysteria. Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 10.

9 Charles Richet, "Les Démoniaques d'aujourd 'hui et d'autrefois," *La Revue des deux mondes* 37 (1880): 340-72, 552-83, 828-63; quoted in and translated by Martha Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts. A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 30.

10 Jules Falret, "Folie raisonnante ou folie morale" in *Etudes cliniques sur les maladies mentales et nerveuses* (Paris: Librarie Ballière et Fils, 1890); quoted in and translated by Veith, *op. cit*, p. 211.

11 F. Wittels, 'The Hysterical Character,' *Medical Reviews of Reviews* 36 (1930): 186-190; quoted in Pauline B. Bart & Diana H. Scully, 'The Politics of Hysteria: The Case of the Wandering Womb' in Edith S. Gomberg (ed.), *Gender and Disordered Behavior: Sex Differences in Psychopathology* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979), pp.354-380 (p.368).

12 Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study*, translated by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1952), pp.29-30; quoted in Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria. Neurosis, Mysticism and Gender in European*

Culture (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 19.

13 Evans, *Fits and Starts,* p. 44.

14 For a definition of this term, see Caleb Carr: "Prior to the twentieth century, persons suffering from mental illness were thought to be "alienated," not only from the rest of society but from their own true natures. Those experts who studied mental pathologies were therefore known as *alienists,*" *The Alienist* (London: Warner Books, 1995), p. 1.

15 Joseph Breuer, 'Fräulein Anna O,' in Sigmund Freud & Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria,* translated from the German by James & Alix Strachey; ed. present volume by Angela Richards; originally published as *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. II (London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955); this ed. The Penguin Freud Library vol. III (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1974, reprinted Penguin Books, 1991), p. 83.

16 Freud, 'Fräulein Elisabeth Von R.,' pp. 206-07.

17 Charles Bernheimer, "Introduction: Part One" in Bernheimer & Claire Kahane (ed.), *In Dora's Case. Freud-Hysteria-Feminism* (London: Virago, 1985) 1-18, (p. 7).

18 Jean-Martin Charcot, *Leçons du mardi à la Salpétrière* (Paris: Delahaye et Lecrosnier, 1887-88); quoted in and translated by Evans, *Fits and Starts,* p. 28.

19 Freud, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement," in the *Standard Edition* 11: 1-55 (p.14); quoted in Evans, *Fits and Starts,* p. 26.

20 Paul Dubois, *The Psychic Treatment of Nervous Disorders,* English translation, sixth ed., (New York, 1909); quoted in Showalter, *Hystories,* p. 37.

21 See Marc D. Feldman & Charles V. Ford, with Toni Reinhold, *Patient Or Pretender. Inside the Strange World of Factitious Disorders* (New York & Chichester, England: John Wiley, 1994), pp. 20-23.

22 Ibid, pp. 146-7.

23 Ibid, p. 161.

24 Roy Porter, 'The Body and the Mind, The Doctor and the Patient. Negotiating Hysteria` in Sander Gilman *et al. Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: California University Press, 1993), 225-285 (p. 242).

25 Feldman & Ford, *The Patient as Pretender,* p. viii.

26 Freud, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement" in the *Standard Edition,* 11:1-55 (p. 14) quoted in Evans, *Fits and Starts,* p. 26.

27 Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

28 Bernard de Mandeville, *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysteric Diseases in Three Dialogues* (London, 1725, third edition), p. 270.

29 During the seventeenth century, the work of neurologists Thomas Willis and Thomas Sydenham established the notion that hysteria and hypochondria were essentially gender-differentiated versions of the same "nervous" pathology. As the medical historian Stanley W. Jackson puts it, physicians identified "hysteria as the aspect that generally afflicted women and hypochondriasis as the aspect that generally afflicted men," *Melancholia and Depression. From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 139. This relationship collapsed during the eighteenth century as a result of the work of physicians like

William Cullen and Boissier de Sauvages, who developed nosological categories for mental disorders. Cullen (1710-1790) introduced the term "neurosis." The perception of hysteria and hypochondria as unrelated disorders persists into the modern age, and the supercession of Willis and Sydenham appears to have concretized gender distinctions to the extent that the French alienist Jean-Baptiste Louyer-Villermay´s blunt assertion: "A man cannot be hysterical; he has no uterus" merely carried the gendering of neurosis to its ultimate conclusion (quoted in Mark Micale, *Approaching Hysteria* , p. 161). At the time Mandeville was writing, the recuperation of hypochondria ("the spleen") was being achieved at the expense of hysteria ("the vapours"). Both constituted polysymptomatic, non-psychotic disorders, but as Mandeville´s text demonstrates, for hypochondria to constitute a valorization of a sufferer´s masculinity, it had to be distanced from the feminine pathology of hysteria which only signified weak, histrionic and emotional behaviour. As a literary text which emerges out of a significant transtion in clinical opinion, Mandeville´ s text clearly comments upon its cultural context, but because the author defines the *Treatise* as a satire, its reading of nervous illness within eighteenth-century gender conflict remains ultimately ambivalent.

30 Ibid, pp. 238-9.

31 Ibid, p. 247.

32 Ibid, p. 244.

33 Ibid, p. 354.

34 Ibid, p. 355.

35 Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia. Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature*

(Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 9.

36 de Mandeville, *A Treatise*, pp. 307-8.

37 Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 15.

38 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 267.

39 Stephen Heath, 'Difference,' *Screen* 19 (1978): 51-112 (p.57).

40 Sigmund Freud, *A Fragment of An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, originally published in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vols. VII & X(The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953 & 1955); this ed. *Case Histories I*, The Penguin Freud Library Vol.8; translated from the German by Alix & James Strachey; ed. by James Strachey with Angela Richards & Alan Tyson; the present volume ed. by Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, rep. 1990), p. 66.

41 Ibid, p. 57.

42 Jeffrey Masson, *Against Therapy* (London: Fontana, 1990), p.101.

43 Freud, *Fragment*, p. 59.

44 Ibid, p. 162 & n.

45 Felix Deutsch, M.D., 'A Footnote to Freud's "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria"' in Bernheimer & Kahane, *In Dora's Case*, pp. 35-43 (p. 43).

46 Freud, *Fragment*, p. 37.

47 Ibid, p. 93.

48 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 5 quoted in Evelyne Keitel, *Reading Psychosis. Readers, Texts and Psychoanalysis*, translated by Anthea Bell (Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 62.

49 For a discussion of Freud's use of archaeological models, see Malcolm Bowie, 'Freud's dreams of knowledge' in *Freud, Proust and Lacan. Theory as Fiction*; paperback edition (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 14-44.

50 Kim Morrissey, *Dora: A Case of Hysteria* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994), p. 3.

51 Claire Kahane, 'Introduction: Part Two,' in Kahane & Bernheimer *In Dora's Case*, 19-32, (p. 31).

52 Hélène Cixous, 'The Untenable,' in Cixous & Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, originally published as *La Jeune Née* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975), translated from the French by Betsy Wing & introduced by Sandra M. Gilbert; Theory and History of Literature, vol. 24 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 150.

53 Ibid, p. 154.

54 Clément, 'The Guilty One,' in *The Newly Born Woman*, 3-57 (p. 37).

55 Clément & Cixous, 'The Untenable,' ibid, p. 157.

56 Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 61.

57 Toril Moi, 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora,' in Bernheimer & Kahane, *In Dora's Case*, 181-199 (p. 192).

58 Micale, *Hystories*, p. 84.

59 Keitel, *Reading Psychosis*, p. 78.

60 Juliet Mitchell, *Woman: The Longest Revolution. Essays in Feminism,Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 290.

61 Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p. 435n.

62 Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, p. 29.

63 Ibid, p. 21.

64 I am indebted to Cristina Mazzoni for this point, ibid, pp. 24-5.

65 Freud & Breuer, 'On the Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomenon: Preliminary Communication,' *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 61.

66 Eleanor Davies, *The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal/Present this to Mr. Mace the Prophet of the Most High, his Messenger* (London? 1646), p. 5.

67 Ibid, pp. 7-8.

68 Ibid, p. 8.

69 Esther S. Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit. Dame Eleanor Davies, Never Soe Mad a Ladie* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 29-30; E.A. Petroff, 'Medieval Women Visionaries: Seven Stages to Power,' *Frontiers* 3 (1978), 34-45.

70 Ibid, pp. 9-10.

71 --, *The Boy of Bilson: Or, A True Discovery of the Late Notorious Impostures of Certain Romish Priests in their Pretended Exorcisme, or expulsion of the Divell out of a young Boy, named William Perry, sonne of Thomas Perry of Bilson, in the County of Stafford, Yeoman. Upon which occasion, hereunto is premitted A Briefe Theologicall Discourse, by way of Caution, for the more easie discerning of such Romish Spirits; and iudging of their false pretences, both in this and the like Practices* (London, 1622), pp. 48-9.

72 Ibid, pp. 52-3.

73 Ibid, p. 54.

74 Ibid, p. 57.

75 Ibid, p. 59.

76 Ibid, p. 60.

77 Ibid, p. 61.

78 Ibid, p. 71.

79 Ibid, p. 73.

80 Nicholas P. Spanos & Jack Gottlieb, 'Demonic Possession, Mesmerism and Hysteria: A Social Psychological Perspective on Their Historical Interrelations,' *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 88 (1979), 527-546 (pp. 534-5).

81 Ibid, p. 537.

82 *The Boy of Bilson* reproduces legal depositions from witnesses and from the defendent, William Perry, together with the exact dates and precise locations of where these depositions were given. William Perry was interrogated twice by the Bishop of Coventry at Eccleshall Castle, on the 8th and 13th October. The text details each of the Bishop's questions and Perry's responses. For example, Perry is asked whether he considered harming himself once suspicions about his "demonic possession" began to be aroused. The text continues: "He answereth, that he had; for (saith he) the Diuell had steeled my heart, so that I cared not to hang my selfe; and had purposed to doe so one night, but that I was watched and hindred." This is followed by the comment that all Christians (i.e., protestants) should be concerned about the truth (pp. 70-1). I suggest that the editor(s) of the text do not perceive legal process as incompatible with theological argument. Instead, the weight of overwhelming legal as well as doctrinal proof confirms the righteousness of protestant belief and exposes the "fiction" of Catholicism. The court becomes an important space where critical issues of belief and doctrine can be debated and (most important of all) brought to a resolution. The editor(s) of *The Boy of Bilson* recognise that the Eccleshall court is a significant resource for their cause and exploit to the fullest its validating power in print form.

83 Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called The Suffocation of the Mother* (London? 1603), sig. A2v.

84 Ibid, sigs. A2v-A3r.

85 Ibid, sig. B1r.

86 Ibid, sig. G2v.

87 Michael MacDonald (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London. Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover Case*, Tavistock Classics in the History of Psychiatry, (London & New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991), p. xix. This edition contains facsimiles of *A Briefe Discourse* and John Swan's *A True and Briefe Report of Mary Glovers Vexation*, and a transcription of Stephen Bradwell's MS account, *Mary Glovers Late Woeful Case*.

88 John Swan, *A True and Briefe Report of Mary Glovers Vexation* (London? 1603), p. 47.

89 Jeffrey Boss, 'The seventeenth-century transformation of the hysteric affection, and Sydenham's Baconian medicine,' *Psychological Medicine* 9 (1979), 221-234 (p. 223).

90 G.S. Rousseau, '"A Strange Pathology": Hysteria in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800,' in Gilman *et al. Hysteria Beyond Freud*, 91-221 (p. 93,102).

91 Thomas Sydenham, *Practice of Physick*, second ed., with additions by William Salmon (London, 1707), p. 469.

Chapter Three:

Recovering Eve:

The Seventeenth-Century Bible and Proto-Feminist Hermeneutics

The Word and the Text: Religious Language As Biblical Language

As we saw at the end of the last chapter, *The Boy of Bilson*, as a protestant text, constructed as its Other the 'extraneous' ritualism of the Roman Catholic Church, which protestants regarded as a deviation from scripture and therefore as erroneous. Seventeenth-century protestantism was a religion based upon the Word, as even the most cursory reading of any protestant text from this period demonstrates. Writers of prophecies, spiritual autobiographies, contemplative works and works of scriptural exegesis alike circulate around the Bible. Richly allusive and strewn with Biblical references, the authors of these texts situate subjective experiences and socio-political events within the context of the Bible, imagining it as both the source of their writing and its point of destination, at which the revelation of religious truth is anticipated.

The Bible informs textual production during this period not simply as cultural resource or authoritative archive of Christian history, but as something which invigorates and animates spirituality as a lived experience. This could simultaneously be enacted and communicated via the text, inviting the reader to emulate the author's relationship with scripture. Working from the premise that the Word was the origin of the protestant religion, authors of pious texts constructed the Christian as a diligent reader. The difficulty of the Bible as a text was emphasized rather than avoided. For the Christian-reader, reading was a form of arduous and sometimes frustrating labour, during which the meaning of a particular 'hard place' in scripture might continue to elude him or her. Pious texts provided sustenance in the form of assurances that the greatest of

divine rewards were reserved for those who tackled notoriously difficult parts of scripture, like the Book of Revelation, instructing readers to prepare for the moment at which the Bible's meaning would be made manifest.

The distinction made by texts like *The Boy Of Bilson* between the precision of protestant adherence to the rule of scripture and the error of the Romish Church in splitting from it polarizes the issue of religious language and specifically Biblical language. As a self-interested, partial text with a specific didactic function, we should not be surprised that the protestant writer(s) of *The Boy of Bilson* subsumed the complexities of the debate about religious language into affirmatory statements about the righteousness of the protestant faith. But while the protestant church asserted that all religious practice must derive from the rule of scripture, its unease over the use of the Bible by some of its more militant and outspoken members to justify experiential forms of religious practice was a factor in the development of sectarian groups.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the absence of a coherent Church of England precipitated a pluralistic debate about belief and authority. This lack of consensus rendered the Bible as a site of contestation. Any attempt by the historian to schematize English protestantism into factions of moderation and militantism is complicated by the fact that any sense of 'authority' to which individuals chose to conform or subvert was either missing or improvised. There were advantages to these conditions, since mass participation in the debates over religiosity was possible. But at the same time, public access to the printed Bible posed questions about the effects of mass consumption upon scriptural meaning. The evolution of scripture from a 'closed' Latinate text under the

control of clerics to a 'nationalized' vernacular made accessible to the public through the innovation of print created anxieties about the authorization and regulation of religious language.

The popular promotion of a Bible that was 'alive' and accessible to all conflicted with organized religion's need for a Bible which produced consistent meanings and could be contextualized in order to replicate and maintain religious belief. Many bishops felt that public access combined with print culture threatened the integrity of scripture, contaminating the purity of religious truth with the 'cacophany' of prophane and secular voices.[1] What did it mean for individuals to speak the Word of God by quoting from the Bible, to discuss interpretive issues with others, or to explicate the Bible in print? What happened to scriptural meaning when vernacular translations were produced? Should non-Biblical language (such as commentary) be clearly differentiated from the Biblical text? Restrictive practices curbing the interaction between scripture and the people were justifiable if the Bible was interpreted as being in urgent need of conservation.[2]

As I want to argue, the opposing sides in the early modern religious language debate made a case either for conservation or reformation of the Bible *qua* religious language. The bishops feared that once people had access to a vernacular Bible, when they had hitherto 'got by' on various snippets of the saints' lives and other miscellaneous fragments, the Bible would lose its prestige and significance: it would become debased into the 'everyday.' In fact, this was precisely what the Calvinist reformers wished to avoid: they argued that the Bible's vitality should radiate into all aspects of existence, so that the everyday could be elevated by divine truth. Despite apparent grounds for agreement in the centrality and uniqueness of scripture,

the Bible remained a controversial and ultimately unresolvable issue for English protestantism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was possible to comprehend the Bible as a *text* critical to the formation and replication of religious belief, and, for the nonconformists, to conceive of a process by which the supernatural transformed language into a revelatory personal experience, but the implications raised by the Bible's textuality were complex and potentially disturbing for all the participants in the debate.

This chapter will trace the historical-cultural context of the early modern Bible and relate it to the experiences of seventeenth-century women who engage in religious language debates and who posit themselves in relation to a specifically patriarchal authority. For the purposes of this chapter, we will be considering both women who acted as self-conscious 'petitioners' on behalf of women's spiritual, economic or educational opportunities and women prophets, who were frequently unintentional participants in the debate by virtue of the iconic significance of their utterance. Nevertheless, women prophets might also intervene as agents in discussions about how the accessibility of the Bible to women was significant for the roles and opportunities available to them in the wider culture.

Radical Readings: Protestant Belief and the Early Modern Bible

It is necessary to contextualize the Calvinist reformers' projected revolution of religious language by identifying its political and cultural origins. We need to establish a notion of the scriptures not as 'pre-cultural' or transhistorical text(s), but as a specifically seventeenth-century Bible, produced and mediated by

contemporary political and social discourses. My intention here is to suggest how contemporary events in early modern England helped to (re)fashion the seventeenth-century Bible.[3] It needs to be understood that 'protestantism' is a shifting category, and what it signifies during the sixteenth century differs radically from the seventeenth century. But the ambiguous nature of English protestantism and the public perception of it as eroded intensified the desire for reformation. The impetus towards revolution which gripped the more militant elements of English protestantism during the second half of the sixteenth century did not occur without precedent, since the accession of Elizabeth I was perceived as a triumph of protestantism over the persecutions of the Catholic regime under Mary I. Hundreds of ordinary protestants suffered martyrdom at the hands of the authorities, and many protestant clergy fled to Geneva, the site of the Calvinist reformed church. Geneva constituted more than just a safe haven for the self-exiled protestants: it was anticipated that Calvinism would grow as its exponents carried its doctrines to other unreformed nations. By the time Elizabeth came to the throne, John Knox had returned to Scotland and begun reforming the Scottish church along Calvinist lines. English protestants confidently looked to Elizabeth, as their saviour, to restore and strengthen a protestant church which had declined during the three previous reigns.

But Elizabeth had no intention of dismantling the Church of England and refashioning it according to Calvin. She was not interested in doctrine, only in setting up a pragmatic relationship with the Church by severing its links with state power and, specifically, with her own authority. She passed two Bills in 1599, the Acts of Supremacy and of Uniformity. As governor of the Church of England, the people owed

her absolute allegiance and, for the first time, so did the Church. No longer independent of state control, it became an episcopacy (ruled by bishops). She was prepared to tolerate any religious practice as long as it posed no threat to her authority as monarch. This incensed not only Catholics, who believed that the church should remain transcendent and therefore unaffected by political contingencies, but also the Calvinist reformers, who were appalled by what they saw as inadequate and weak reforms.[4]

The Calvinists wanted a presbyterian system of church government, in which a group of elders (including ministers) was responsible for ecclesiastical organisation. They argued that episcopacy gave too much power to the bishops, who arranged the appointment of ministers, but who essentially acted as the agents of the state. The reformers asserted that ministers should be elected by the people they served. Presbyterianism offered a far more democratic system of church organisation, as opposed to the potentially compromising proximity between the Church and state institutions created by episcopacy.

Many of the returning protestant exiles settled in Cambridge, which had been the centre of protestant academic theology during the Reformation. As disillusionment set in once Elizabeth I's policies regarding the Church became apparent, protestant ministers and theologians debated the issues in public sermons and academic discussions. Prominent among these was Thomas Cartwright, a Cambridge graduate who went to Geneva to study law when Mary I came to power and returned to England after Elizabeth's accession. He took up an academic post at Cambridge and became a hugely popular preacher, with the ability to articulate exactly the discontents of the protestant faithful. His sermons suggested that radical measures were called for, given the Elizabethan government's apathy regarding

religious reformation.

Cartwright's much-publicised convictions that the protestant Church should be autonomous and the bishops should be given less power (implying that they were corrupt) were regarded as seditious and resulted in his dismissal from his academic post. However, the authorities could not prevent many people agreeing with his views. One of his supporters, Walter Travers, wrote *The Book of Discipline* (1573?), which was so influential that the bishops, led by John Whitgift and Richard Bancroft (who both held the position of Archbishop of Canterbury) tried unsuccessfully to censor it. Elizabeth maintained her position of refusing to yield to the demands of the Calvinist reformers, while making no organized attempt to silence the dissenting voices. The protestant militants, therefore, continued their campaign for reform, frequently harrassed but never wholly criminalized by the state. They turned to print in order to shift the perimeters of the debate away from the academic circles of Cambridge towards the lives of ordinary protestants, whose support they hoped to gain. When a book like Travers' fell foul of state censorship laws it gained an even greater readership. As a result, the embryonic non-conformist movement which was a consequence of Elizabeth I's government attracted further sympathizers and activists.

In 1572, what became known as the 'Admonition controversy' occurred, which began with an unlicensed petition being sent to parliament demanding far-reaching religious reforms. This petition, entitled the *Admonition*, was written by two clergymen, John Field and Thomas Wilcox. Anticipating reprisals from the government, the authors published their tract anonymously, but nevertheless, both fell under suspicion and eventually confessed. They were imprisoned,

but their text was highly influential in the early stages of protestant nonconformity.[7] Field and Wilcox criticize the Elizabethan government for failing to act on the example of other nations and actively promote and reform the protestant church in England. They demand:

> Is a reformation good for France? and can it be evyl for England? Is discipline meete for Scotland? and is it unprofitable for this Realme? Surely God hath set these examples before your eyes to encourage you to go forward to a thorow and a speedy reformation. You may not do as heretofore you have done, patch and peece, nay rather goe backeward, and never labour or contend to perfection. But altogether remove whole Antichrist, both head body and branch, and perfectly plant that puritie of the word, that simplicitie of the sacraments, and severitie of discipline, which Christ hath commanded, and commended to his church.[5]

It is hardly surprising that the presumptous and demanding tone of the *Admonition* led to the prosecution of its authors for sedition, but the anxious urgency present in the writing is not simply a response to the decay of protestantism under Marian rule. That is to say, it was not merely a reaction to recent *history*. When Field and Wilcox situate the figure of Antichrist within their argument, their intention was not to employ a rhetorical or metaphorical device. Rather, this is an example of what Barry Reay calls the "enculturation" of protestant nonconformity, characterized by " an obsession with the imagery of the books of Revelation and Daniel."[6]

The figure of Antichrist is present in the New Testament in such

forms as "the mystery of iniquity" (2.Thessalonians.2:7). The first epistle of John cements the association between Antichrist and the apocalypse: "even now there are many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last time" (2:18). Throughout the course of the seventeenth century, Antichrist became something of a moveable concept, variously ascribed to the Pope, the bishops, the king, royalists, the ruling classes, and finally Cromwell.[7] In the pre-Civil War England of the 1630s, Archbishop William Laud was seen to be aligning himself with the Romish church and that was enough to make him Antichrist in the eyes of many protestants. According to Revelation, triumph over Antichrist would presage the Second Coming of Christ and the millennium.

The influential role of Biblical prophecy within popular belief and especially in the activity of the radical, millenialist sects, should not detract from the significance of other Biblical texts for public and private piety. Nevertheless, the relevance of Revelation and Daniel for seventeenth-century popular belief cannot simply be explained by what is axiomatic to the divinatory type or element of prophetic texts: that all events they describe appear imminent in the reading process. The twentieth-century lay definition of prophecy has narrowed to only include the prediction of events, so that other meanings of prophecy, such as the prophet as a representative of humanity, may be overlooked. For this very reason we should avoid claiming that early modern readers of biblical prophecy and apocalyptic treated these texts simply as 'programmes' or schedules for the end of the world, which is frequently the assumption that is made. The interaction between the Bible, politics and print culture was far more complex than that.

A twentieth-century example of the appropriation of prophecy,

specifically apocalyptic, is the American drama series *Millennium*, which takes as its subject violent and serial crime. Arguably, this programme originates out of contemporary popular fascination with serial killers and the development of increasingly sophisticated forensic techniques and criminal profiling used to solve such crimes. But Chris Carter, the creator of *Millennium*, has contributed a distinctly *fin de siècle* edge to the trope of violence. The series title alludes to this, of course, but it is made explicit in the opening credits, which begin with a biblical quotation which is often apocalyptic in tone. The link between apocalyptic prophecy and the state of late twentieth-century culture is reinforced by the tag lines which follow. In *Millennium's* second series these read: "this is who we are" and "the time is near."

The programme's hero is Frank Black, a criminal profiler whose skills verge upon the uncanny, since he possesses the ability to 'see' through the eyes of the offender. He is employed by a mysterious organisation called the Millennium Group, which dispatches him to consult in cases of unsolved violent crime. In an episode from the second series, entitled '19:19,' Frank Black is assigned to a case where eighteen children are abducted as they travel to school on their bus. Although the police manage to arrest an accomplice, they fail to extract any information from him. Their only 'lead' is a cryptic message sent by the abductor, a verse from Revelation: "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army" (*Revelation* 19:19). Black, Watts (Black's contact from the Millennium Group) and the local police attempt to decode this scripture-as-message, discussing whether the abductor perceives himself as the Lamb waging war against Antichrist and the beast, or,

conversely, that he identifies with the Antichristian figure on horseback.

The investigators are represented as experienced Bible *readers* rather than *believers*: what is being suggested is that in *fin de sèicle* American culture, the language of the Bible has become associated with deviance and criminality. Scripture has virtually become an idiom of violence. To criminal investigators, biblical hermeneutics constitutes one of a number of 'profiling' techniques designed to identify serial offenders. When blood-stained children's clothing is discovered, general panic ensues, but forensic examination reveals the blood to have come from lambs. Black surmises that the abductor believes himself to be a figure of salvation. The children are eventually rescued unharmed, and their school building is destroyed by a tornado on the day of their rescue (when they would normally have been at school). Credence is thus given to the supposedly 'psychotic' abductor's belief that he was protecting the children from the machinations of Antichrist. Despite the careful and rational analyses of what Revelation, within this particular context, might mean, Black and his colleagues have not 'solved' the text. They apprehend their man and save the children's lives, but Revelation persists as an uncanny text.

A nice touch, indicative of the relationship between the Bible and twentieth-century mass culture, is provided by Watts, who helps to identify the abductors by consulting a Millennium Group database listing the names and addresses of individuals who have recently purchased a Bible. Intriguingly, ownership of a Bible signifies criminal tendencies! The salient point is that we ourselves are not exempt from investing Biblical prophecy with contemporary resonances.

Biblical scholars tend to juxtapose individuals who have scrutinized the mathematics of Revelation and produced calculations which 'prove' it relates to their own historical period, with the critical evaluation of the text as cultural artefact and anachronism. They argue that, beyond the world of John and his intended readers. Revelation must 'inevitably' be read as symbolic. For instance, John Sweet in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* comments that throughout the history of Christianity, people have believed themselves to be living at "the penultimate moment...identifying beast and harlot with current bogies." He concludes: "*it is now clear* that John wrote for a past situation and that to look for literal fulfillments in the events of our day is misguided" (italics my emphasis).[8]

This reading of biblical apocalyptic is not invalid *per se*, but what is problematic about it is the way in which it derogates previous historical-cultural interpretations of biblical prophetic and apocalyptic texts, assuming that they were limited to laborious (and pointless) numerical calculation. I suggest that the contemporary resonances with which biblical prophecy became invested during the seventeenth century can be better understood by recovering the culture of reading which was intrinsic to the way the Bible was experienced in everyday life.

Therefore, we should not attempt to segregate 'influential' texts like Revelation, but rather situate them within a notion of the Bible as a group of texts, which necessitates the development of specific hermeneutic strategies. Using such an approach, the Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary's study of the Two Witnesses described in Revelation 11, in which she dates their arrival on earth, can be interpreted not as erroneous literalism, but as culturally mediated by an economy of

reading which treats interpretation as a form of labour. Within the terms of this concept of reading, the subject's total immersion within the text can, in special circumstances, give rise to prophetic activity. I want to discuss the books of Daniel and Revelation as biblical models not only of prophecy, but of reading and interpretation, and suggest how these models were appropriated and developed during the seventeenth century. The theologian Richard Bauckham has remarked that Revelation functions as a type of 'sequel' to the text of Daniel:

> Whereas Daniel wrote for an eschatological future which was far distant from him, that same eschatological future now impinged directly on John [the author of Revelation] and his readers. Therefore, while Daniel's visions were to be kept secret until the time to which they were applied, John's were to be made public at once.[9]

A relationship exists between the two texts which is concerned with the prediction and actual onset of the end of history. This relationship manifests itself in a number of thematic echoes. At the end of the book of Daniel, the apocalypse is described to Daniel, who is then instructed: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, *even* to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (12:4). In 12:5-7, Daniel has a vision in which two angels discuss the period before the end of the world. Daniel becomes confused: "I heard, but I understood not." He asks: "O my Lord, what *shall be* the end of these *things?*" The angel replies: "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (12:9).

Daniel experiences three prophetic visions. Concerning the last, we are told: "the thing *was* true, but the time appointed *was* long" (10:1). The text of Daniel closes, then, with a deferral: Daniel's knowledge is incomplete and ambiguous. Within the genre of prophecy, it would be illogical if the sealed book of 12:4 prohibited the circulation of Daniel's visions among the faithful. This book, inaccessible for Daniel's time, could refer to a future divine revelation about the end of the world, in which a more exact date will supercede the "thousand three hundred and five and thirty days" indicated by the angel (12:11). Alternatively, the sealed book could constitute a deferral not of access (to a text, the meaning of which would be self-evident and explicit to the reader), but of understanding (suggesting that the role of the prophet is primarily one of reading rather than vocalizing the "word" of God, where the *communication* of that meaning is almost incidental). The prophet may inhabit privileged space, at least for the duration of the period he or she enters the prophetic mode, but by the end of the text, Daniel is no more enlightened than his reader. The 'truth' is not so much 'out there' as contained 'within' Daniel's confused account of his own visions. Daniel has written down the prophecy, but, critically, *has not understood it*. But, as the angel says, Daniel should not be too disheartened by his failure to grasp the truth, because no-one else will be able to understand it either. It is unclear whether the pre-apocalyptic period is given over for the improvement of hermeneutic technique, or whether a new revelation will indeed arrive in the interim.

The New Testament book of Revelation "supplements and clarifies" the events of Daniel, which, as we have seen, were characterized by deferral and ambivalence.[10] In 10:1-2, John, author of Revelation,

receives his induction into prophecy. He has a vision in which an angel descends from heaven bearing a scroll. The angel stands, his left foot on earth, his right in the sea, and calls out to the seven thunders. They answer with a loud roar. "And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices," John continues, "I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (10:4). John watches as the angel vows in God's name "that there should be time no longer. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (10:5-7). The voice from heaven instructs John to take the little scroll the angel has been carrying. John asked for the scroll, and the angel tells him to eat it, but warns: "it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey." John consumes the scroll, finding it as sweet as the angel had said but bitter in his stomach. He is told: "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (10:8-11).

The angel of Revelation 10 signals that the period leading up to the end of history has begun, and after John ingests the scroll, there are further revelations about the time scale of the "last times." For example, we are told about the two witnesses in Revelation 11, who will proclaim God's message during "a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days" (11:3). This scroll, which constitutes both the initiation into prophecy and the prophecy itself (a revelation of God's plan which will be fulfilled by the apocalypse), is also the sealed book of Daniel 12:4. The critical difference is the mystical process which enables John to experience the unfolding of the apocalypse in a series of graphic visions. Prophecy is figured as an

active rather than passive process. John starts to transcribe the angel's conversation with the seven thunders, but is dissuaded. John's own tendency to understand his prophetic role in terms of reportage or 'thin' reading is rejected, and he learns that the only way to overcome the deficiencies of his understanding is to assimilate the text.

On a superficial level, by eating the scroll John is 'switched on' to prophecy. Yet it is important to interpret this process not as simple ingestion, but as *incorporation*. John is no longer relaying information from a text that has an implied divine source, but instead his body has *become* the prophetic text. What does this mean? In the act of taking in this spiritual 'food,' John literally becomes what he eats. The symbolics of ingestion in relation to the prophetic role are suggestive for theorizing an hermeneutics of biblical prophecy.

From the outset, John is warned that to consume the scroll is problematic. Cultural theorists have recognized that the act of eating disrupts the boundaries between the external world and the body. As C. Fischler notes, the practice of eating "is both banal and fraught with potentially irreversible consequences."[11] Food is a liminal substance, whether it is regarded as 'edible' or not. It is by no means inevitable that a food substance will be safely digested, with the absorption of nutrient and the excretion of waste products. The risk that the food substance may contaminate, infect or even colonize the host body is continuously present. Food is a biological necessity, but the consequences of ingesting the 'wrong' type of food extend beyond the purely pathological. Food also constitutes a threat to subjectivity, a Trojan horse which may has the potential to transform self as well as body. This has implications not just for the

individual-as-consumer, but also for the community, which will have to deal with the associated changes in status and function of the individual whose somatic and psychological health is compromised by an ingested substance.

For John, then, the magnitude of what he is being asked to do should not be underestimated. The scroll is described as honey-sweet on the tongue (honey was associated with pleasure and elevated mood by classical writers), but sensual delight is rapidly replaced by visceral sensations of bitterness and discomfort.[12] John is told he will suffer *in-digestion*: the "irreversible consequences" of ingesting a substance which is only momentarily pleasurable and possibly not even healthful. The interesting point is that he is *told*, forewarned: he does not blithely swallow a substance which he believes to be edible and safe.

If food is a liminal substance, the mouth constitutes a liminal zone, the site both of consumption and control. It accommodates the tongue, which is associated with desire and sensuality, but which paradoxically is the organ of speech and rationality. Therefore, in the tongue a close proximity exists between nature and culture, desire and rationality. This helps to explain why models of biblical prophecy, such as Jonah, Daniel and Revelation, represent ambivalence as the inevitable consequence of accepting and enacting the prophetic role.

As was discussed in the first chapter, Jonah, pursued across the world by God when he refuses to prophesy at Ninevah, prefers being eaten by the whale to ingesting (or embodying) the word of God. The whale is forced to vomit up its disobedient stowaway. In an act which is equally involuntary, Jonah is compelled to disgorge God's message to humanity. But Jonah has not truly repented for trying to escape his

pre-ordained role, nor has he willingly submitted. Inside the whale, he speaks the words of a psalm, its message of reassurance and comfort contradicted by his own relationship with God. The explicit resistance of Jonah's manipulation of religious language cannot be elided. The mouth, then, is a capricious organ even for God, who is represented in the book of Daniel according to Old Testament convention: as master and dictatorial patriarch. In Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, the warning given to John about the scroll constitutes a reiteration of the 'unpalatable truths' associated with prophetic activity.

In both texts the prophet's role exceeds functioning merely as a 'human circuit' where the divine message is received and communicated to an audience, but also demands from the prophet a certain degree of competence in reading and hermeneutics. As biblical models of prophecy, Daniel and Revelation suggest the irrelevance of differentiating between prophecy as utterance and as published text. Therefore, the pleasure/pain dialectic of Revelation 10 refers not only to the transformation of the prophet's social status, but also to the problems of reading.

Gender and the Regulation of Reading in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

This dialectic is suggestive within the context of English protestantism, a religion heavily reliant upon the biblical text. Printed Bibles were supplied with reading guides in an effort to encourage the laity to adopt a structured and disciplined mode of scriptural reading. The Geneva Bible of 1560 was widely recognized as synonymous with nonconformity.[13] It included a reading guide, which

provided detailed instructions about when the scriptures should be read and for how long.[14] A subject index was also supplied, enabling the patriarch to easily locate the Bible's instruction relating to any conceivable issue, be it family or community life, or difficult religious questions.

The theologians who drew up these guidelines were concerned with more than simply transforming the Bible into a household manual, however. In the decades following the availability of printed Bibles, they had become increasingly aware of the need to supervise the laity's access to the Bible. In the Preface to his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593), the divine Richard Hooker notes the dangers of 'unschooled' lay interpretation: "When they and their Bibles were alone together, what strange, fantastical opinion soever at any time entered into their heads, their use was to think the Spirit taught it them."[15]

The Bible was even more important to the nonconformist movement, as it became increasingly subject to persecution during the seventeenth century and had to rely more upon the Bible to cement belief between its often fragmented believers, as the authorities introduced legislation which restricted opportunities to meet publicly. Writers of nonconformist manuals tried to compensate for this loss of congregational space by putting increased emphasis upon private piety. Richard Baxter's *The Christian Directory* (1673) gives detailed guidance on reading the Bible, plus a reading list of 'authorized' nonconformist authors.[16] He provides the coda that the reader should always consult their minister if "*stalled by any difficulty.*"[17] Baxter wryly notes that texts like his are an essential adjunct to scripture, since "lively Books may be easier had, than lively Preachers."[18]

We could say that an individual's reading of the Bible was mediated by a number of factors. It was influenced by anxiety about 'corruption' and misinterpretation. The Bible was situated very firmly at the centre of family life. How the scriptures were interpreted was also affected by religious affiliation and the interaction of these beliefs with the wider community and, to a certain extent, with the political and cultural life of the entire nation. These elements had the compound effect of creating among the laity a highly personalized and intense relation to the Bible, which could be defined as ascetic in type. As I have argued, the more marginalized public expressions of piety became amongst nonconformist and sectarian splinter groups, the more the Bible would (literally and symbolically) constitute the beliefs and activities of such a group.

It is not surprising that biblical texts which represented faith under attack from persecution were apposite for those undergoing similar privations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but what is relevant to the scope of this inquiry is the precise manner of this relationship between the Bible and social actors during the early modern period. Texts like Daniel and Revelation were appropriated as models for an evolving notion of reading practice. As apocalyptic prophecies *per se*, these texts were highly relevant to the revolutionary members of millennial sects, and, as has been noted, certain elements circulated more widely and became part of the latent cultural vocabulary, such as Antichrist.

But it is within the context of privatized, domestic piety that Revelation and Daniel were most influential, and where they were privileged as as challenging but potentially rewarding texts. For the nonconformists, who believed that protestantism in England was

evolving into a state agency and losing its autonomy, household and familial practices of piety were regarded as pivotal to belief. In addition to the considerable number of manuals of piety published by protestant ministers, many lay authors described their own devotional practices. These texts represent the faithful believer as an isolated but literate individual.[19]

The auxiliary and guidance literature which proliferated around the seventeenth-century Bible constructed a model of reading which, I want to suggest, was particularly accessible to women. The epistles of St. Paul legitimized the extensive reiteration of women's subjection within cultural discourses. In his first letter to the troubled church at Corinth, Paul argued that women's presence among the congregation should be a silent one: "for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience" (*I.Corinthians 14:34*). Paul was understood to be stipulating that a women's place was unequivocally not in church government. At home, she could discuss scripture or sermon with her husband, but her position remained that of a subordinate: the unlearned pupil to her husband's wise instruction.

Despite the promotion of the silent woman in religious discourse, women were encouraged to read their Bibles (provided, of course, that they themselves were literate). In fact, people would learn to read using the vernacular Bible, and were much less likely to have opportunities to learn, for example, Greek and Latin unless they had had a classical education. Such a high level of education was provided in aristocratic households, and daughters did sometimes benefit from this alongside sons, as in the case of Eleanor Davies, who was proficient in Latin and Greek, amongst other things. But by definition a classical education was only open to a minority. David

Featley addressed the issue of women's restricted literacy in his devotional collection by justifying writing in "noe language but English" because it would ensure that his text would be accessible to its target audience.[20] We have already noted that attempts were made to supervise and guide individuals' reading of the Bible, but it was also the case that this advice was *gendered*. It was seen as necessary to target women with this advice because they were not merely independent, solitary readers. Within the early modern household, they were also expected to supervise the family's reading of the Bible.

Devotional manuals which specifically targeted a female audience attempted to regulate this reading. Suzanne Trill has pointed out that while early modern English protestantism was not unique in focusing on the psalm, what is of interest is that psalms were regarded as being particularly suitable for a female readership.[21] Protestant texts such as Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones* (1582) and David Featley's *A Fountaine of teares emptying it selfe into Three Rivelets* (1646) are anthologies of meditations and prayers specifically 'packaged' for women, which demonstrate the use of psalms for spiritual consolation. Such texts strategically intercept the teleologism whereby the 'I' of the speaker of the psalm is assumed to be masculine. They therefore enable the woman reader to identify with the psalm as a form of religious expression available to her. The psalms were central to seventeenth-century devotional practice because they reflected the soul's relation to God; reading them was equivalent to speaking to God. The psalms, despite being formulaic in structure, were not intended to be read in rote, but instead protestant devotional manuals demonstrated how they could be adapted to specific (personal, political and cultural)

circumstances.

By appropriating the psalms, seventeenth-century protestant authors attempted to harness the power of female devotion in order to promote the interests of the protestant faith. At the same time, the psalms functioned as a powerful adjunct to the conduct literature which played a significant role in the socialization of women. Devotional texts addressed to women 'produced' the woman-as-reader according to predefined cultural specifications. If the Bible constituted an accessible (re)source for women's literacy and education, legitimizing certain biblical texts such as the psalms as particularly 'woman friendly' explicitly defines the limits of female educational attainment. The psalms could be invoked as justification for locating women's religious experience within the domestic space.

The Bishop of Carlisle, Edward Rainbow's funeral sermon on the life of Lady Anne Clifford, printed in 1677, certainly gives this impression. Rainbow takes his cue from Proverbs 14:1: "Every wise Woman buildeth her House," from which he goes on to represent Clifford's virtues as housewifely ones. He argues: "The House is the Womans Province, her Sphear wherein she is to Act, while she is abroad she is out of her Territories; she is a Ruler out of his Jurisdiction."[22] Yet, seen within the context of Anne Clifford's protracted and eventually successful legal battles to gain possession of property and estates entailed onto her paternal uncle, by representing Clifford as an exemplary housewife, Rainbow is attempting to defuse the turbulence caused to patriarchy by her forays into the male-dominated worlds of politics and law.

From her diaries, it is clear that Clifford was an ardent reader of the Psalms, but the outcome was not this particular reader's

assimilation of those attributes such as humility, obedience and passivity which were integral to the early modern construction of femininity. Instead, Anne Clifford derived a considerable amount of comfort and encouragement from the Psalms, particularly following the death of her mother, Margaret Russell, daughter of the Earl of Bedford, who had helped her contest her father's will in the first place and was her sternest supporter. She certainly needed all the strength she could get, since both of her husbands, Richard Sackville and Philip Herbert, refused to support her and tried to persuade her to desist. James I also attempted persuasion, and when that failed, he secured Sackville's aid to disinherit her in 1616.[23]

Anne Clifford's diaries, which survive in a number of original manuscripts and transcriptions, are not merely constitutive of the life of a woman whose legal battles challenged seventeenth-century political order, but construct a mode of biblical reading which diverged from the practice prescribed by theologians, where scripture played an essential role in the socialization of women. This process was threatened by the existence of Clifford's texts, which constitute an object lesson in how women can transcend the theological discourses designed to regulate their reading of scripture.

The imprint of patriarchal authority is thus invested in Edward Rainbow's sermon, which, as a printed text is assured of being more influential and wider-reaching than Clifford's diaries, which were not published prior to the twentieth century. Rainbow is explicit about the function of his text when he remarks that Clifford should be "a *glass* or *Mirrour*, for others of that Quality, or Sex, to dress themselves by her Example."[24] But since Clifford politicized herself beyond the limits of the domestic and private, Rainbow's task

was to reassemble her into a edifying standard of femininity. As Mary Lamb has argued, Rainbow's sermon: "reveals some ways by which her subversion was prevented from serving as a dangerous precedent to women of subsequent generations."[25] The Bishop's eulogy domesticates the disturbing implications of Clifford's status as a learned woman and a property owner. He emphasizes how Clifford behaved in an exemplary manner in using her wealth and capabilities appropriately. We are told she might have "sought Fame rather than Wisdom" and chose to pursue the path of intellectual achievement. Instead, commendably, "*she chose the better part*, of Learning; the Doctrine of Christ."[26] She devoted herself to the care of the poor and the restoration of God's churches.

Edward Rainbow's revisionist sermon on Lady Anne Clifford demonstrates the fact that, for early modern women, the category of 'reader' was a contested one. The Bible was intended to be the tool of women's socialization but it could also offer opportunities for their personal and spiritual emancipation. As we have seen, English protestantism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed the discursive framework which enabled spiritual practices to become increasingly individuated, even to the detriment of consensus about issues of doctrine and organisation. For women who were able to read, the Bible was available to them just as much as to any other (literate) member of the household.

For numerous women, the Bible was the means by which they could legitimately pass from the limited pursuits of the household into the extra-curricular activities of the intellect. However, when a woman like Clifford resists the attempts to discipline and regulate her reading, she becomes the target of a male reader who superimposes his own text upon the text written by her. His assertion of the definitive

nature of his interpretation necessarily erases her agency as a nascent subject (since it is writing which enables women to define their own subjectivity).

If the devotional and conduct literature, designed to try to ensure the seclusion of women's piety, constituted the most basic and perhaps benign system of regulation, when a woman's experiences of reading the Bible were no longer contained within the household and entered the discursive space of print, she generated more overt strategies of intervention and suppression. The work of the Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary, self-styled "reader" rather than "prophet," will now be examined within the context of interpretative strategies, publishing and the gendering of reading.

'Scripture-Prophesies:' Mary Cary and the Prophet as Reader

The Resurrection of the Witnesses (1648) begins with an epistle *To The Reader,* in which Cary appears anxious to distinguish herself from prophets and visionaries. "I say not, " she insists, "that I have any immediate revelation that the Witnesses are risen, or that I have been told it by an Angel, or the like." Cary describes a conventional protestant childhood in which the Bible was ubiquitous, but her relationship to the text was transformed when she reached the age of fifteen. She was "set upon a serious and continual study of the Scriptures in general, and more particularly of the Book of the Revelation, and of the Prophecies of *Isaiah, Ieremiah,* and *Daniel.*" Cary becomes preoccupied with Revelation 11, and she begins a study of this text which eventually leads to her writing *The Resurrection.* Cary suggests that recent events ("great providences" revealed by God "in the six or seven foregoing years) indicate that the date of

the date at which the Witnesses will cease prophesying "in sackcloth" is April 5 1645. (In a detailed *e*mendation to the second edition of her text, published in 1653, Cary notes that this date was the beginning of the Army's victory over the forces of Antichrist).

The fact of this concordance between seventeenth-century history and the fulfillment of a New Testament prophecy is less important than the process which gives rise to it. Cary emphasizes that the text is not made explicable in a spontaneous, epiphanic manner as in an "immediate revelation." Instead, understanding is released in small increments over a long period. Revelation is a text which Cary "had often studied before:" a text which the reader must circulate or iterate repeatedly if she hopes to derive meaning from it.[27] Local, contemporary precedents for the realization of a prophecy would never become identified if the prophetic text was accessed only occasionally or infrequently by readers. Cary therefore exhorts her reader not to be "discouraged" by Revelation, persuading the reader to look frequently at the "dark and mysterious" pages of Revelation by emphasizing the considerable rewards God reserves for his studious believers.[28]

Cary ostentatiously denies that God has bestowed any special status upon *her*, pointing out that what she has discerned from reading Revelation is not necessarily unique. As far as she knows, *The Resurrection* does not recapitulate the work of previous *published* authors and may therefore be regarded as innovative, but "whether any other have yet observed it, I know not."[29] The tradition of the prophetic text which involves both the accretion and deferral of meaning insists that a successive text extends or augments understanding. In the same way, the commercial interests of printers demand that a text can differentiate itself from others and therefore

reach a considerable proportion of the book-buying market.

By implication, Cary's exegesis of Revelation 11 inserts itself within that prophetic tradition by emphasizing the 'timeliness' of her message. Her appropriation of the divine authority conferred upon the prophet is apparent at the point where she politicizes her text. Cary's writings move from scriptural exegesis into the rhetoric of radical politics. She addresses herself to European rulers, warning them of the dire consequences of engaging England in war: "For in falling foul with the Common-wealth of *England* you will not oppose men only, but be found fighters against God."[30] The arrival of God's two Witnesses has guaranteed the New Model Army's status as an unconquerable military strength. "Those that are nick-named the *Puritans* of *England*...are the Lord's people," she asserts, to compensate for the increasing disillusionment felt by nonconformists in England.[31] In her text *Twelve Humble Proposals* (1653), Cary urges England's rulers to adopt the democratic principals of spiritual government, providing livings for impoverished ministers and abolishing the hated system of tithes.[32]

Yet Cary's identification with a community of un(der)privileged readers and her efforts to dispel the perception of Revelation as an elite or minority text, available solely to clerics or the recipients of divine inspiration, are strategies which resist attributing prophetic status onto her. In *A Word in Season to the Kingdom of England* (1647), Cary argues that the spirit of prophecy is not "tied up" in "humane learning." But she does not include herself amongst those who "have had no learning" but who nevertheless bring forth "spirituall truths."[33]

It could be argued that Cary's denial of herself as a prophet

constitutes a symptom of the self-deprecating behaviour which early modern women were obliged to produce whenever their actions might be regarded as transgressing the limits of gendered religiosity. Cary describes herself as a "pensill, or pen" in the epistle to *The Little Horn's Doom and Downfall* (1651), an explication of Daniel 7.[34] But arguing that Cary's projected self-image as a mere instrument rather than an agent is indicative of gender disparities within seventeenth-century culture takes little account of the issues of biblical reading and interpretation which influenced Cary's sense of herself as an author and exegete to an equal if not greater extent than the supposedly deterministic effects of gender conditioning.

Cary proceeds from a 'hard place' in Revelation to an impassioned plea for social reform not because she is using scripture to legitimize a personal preoccupation, but because religion and politics were conterminous to her. She encourages her readers to persevere with Revelation not solely so that they can anticipate the apocalypse or store up rewards in heaven, but because Cary perceives scriptural literacy as a facilitator for social democracy. Revelation itself could prove a timely reminder to the ruling elites to eradicate inequality and create systems of government which accorded with divine principles. But, despite her addresses to the statesmen and monarchs of Europe, Cary's religious radicalism targets the ordinary protestant believer. Commenting upon the war with "The Mystical Babylon" (in other words, Rome) in *The Resurrection*, she urges the various factions to end their disputes with each other:

> whether you are such as are commonly called Presbyterians, or Independents, or Anabaptists, if you were saints, if you loved

the Lord Jesus Christ in sincer[it]y, you were all alike hated of, and opposed by the Beast: and it was a grief, and burthen to all your spirits, to see the enemies of Jesus Christ to prevail so much, and you all, both Presbyterians, Independents and Anabaptists did pour out many effectual, fervent prayers against the Beast![35]

Cary hopes that these ordinary protestants, united in their struggle against the popish excesses of Rome, will emulate her example and read Revelation and other scriptural texts they may be unfamiliar with or find difficult. In the interim before the apocalypse, Cary anticipates that the mass circulation of biblical language which she considers to be the prerequisite for social democracy will be instrumental in the process of reform, effected in part by the organized action of ordinary protestants. She argues that "circumstantial things only" are preventing the unity that will help to defeat the Beast and rescue the faithful from the afflictions they currently endure.[36]

Cary's evasiveness about representing herself as a prophet, on the one hand denying that she shares the exalted space of the divinely-inspired in *The Resurrection,* while on the other subtitling *The Little Horn's Doom a "Scripture-Prophesie,"* becomes comprehensible within the context of radical Biblical politics.[37] Cary seems uncomfortable with what she regards as the elitist connotations of the category of 'prophet.' She wants her readers to identify with her, which would be difficult if they perceived her to occupy a privileged position with a degree of spiritual knowledge they could never hope to achieve. The canonical status of the Old and New Testament prophets within the Bible could be said to interfere with

the ability of the ordinary reader to identify with them.

Cary insists that her interpretations of scripture are fallible, incomplete and possibly not even original for the same reasons: she is trying to emphasize that Revelation is available to any reader who is disciplined and diligent in studying it. In *The Little Horn's Doom*, she emphasizes:

> That I do not pretend to be any more exempted from uncertainty, then any other of the deare servants of God have been, to whom God hath very often revealed his secrets; though sometimes, some things of their owne suppositions have slipt from them: and therefore I shall not presse any to believe these things, because I have said them, unlesse they do therein hear the voice of Christ and his spirit setting them home upon them.[38]

Cary defines the perimeters of her hermeneutic role by imagining an ideal type of prophet who acts as a conduit, a 'pure' vessel through which the divine message is channelled. Cary argues that she is *not* a member of this select minority. The legitimacy of her work can only be determined from future divine confirmations or refutations. In the absence of an unambiguous revelation of the divine plan, it is necessary for readers to exercise caution and discrimination when casting their eyes over a work of prophecy which, it is implied, is *always* questionable until a sign is received from God. Cary mediates the Bible as divine text rather than constituting the passive medium through which the text is relayed. Within the discourses of textuality and publishing, Cary engages with the *logos* as an exegete rather than as a transcriber.

The revision of *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* in 1653 retreats

quite considerably from the optimism generated by the date at which the Witnesses will have ceased prophesying (April 5th, 1645) coinciding with the pre-eminence of the New Model Army and, it is implied, of the entire nation. Political, religious and civil unrest in subsequent years suggest that the struggle with Antichristian and Popish forces is not after all at an end. Cary adds postscripts dated 1648 and 1653 urging her readers to redouble their efforts in the great battle, since their persistence will guarantee that they will eventually be successful. She argues that England, precisely because it is a nation with such a high proportion of saints, is the focus for the assaults of the Beast.[39]

The elasticity of Cary's text in spite of continuing political and religious uncertainty during the Cromwellian regime is possible because it is informed by a sense of God's preparations for the end of history which make these obstacles meaningful. With each successive monarch since Elizabeth I, nonconformists in England had experienced a brief flare of optimism, only to have disappointment set in once it became clear that their clarion-calls for a reformed Church and state would go unheeded. Given this culture of disillusionment, it is hardly surprising that Cary admits that prophecy is an issue which "may be probably most stumbled at."[40]

It is perhaps ironic that Cary's radicalism, a product of the political and religious culture of the 1640s and 50s, results in a similar preoccupation with the problems of reading and interpretation which are explored in biblical models of prophecy such as Daniel and Revelation. These texts deconstruct the notion of the 'transcendent' prophet. What Daniel and John desire is explicable, unequivocal meaning; what they get, as a result of the deferral of this ultimate meaning, is ambivalence. Set against both

both the biblical models and the broadness of the early modern definition of prophecy, Cary's writings fulfil the criteria for prophetic texts. Is her refusal to categorize herself as a prophet entirely political, or does it have to do with hermeneutic techniques and the problems of reading?

Because Cary's texts self-consciously refer to the provisional nature of interpretation, they elide their claim to prophecy even as they attempt to secure meaning to the problematic interface between scripture and contemporaneity. The fact that Cary does not articulate a new prophecy, but attempts to show that prophecies which were 'enclosed' (or uncertain) in the Old and New Testaments will be 'unfolded' (or fulfilled) in her own time, does not invalidate her potential status as a prophet. In a sense, all Christian prophecy is derivative. Each additional utterance claims a place in the prophetic tradition, emphasizing its links with other prophetic texts as it attempts to work backwards to an original, divine meaning. But Cary's hesitation about her right to the title is due to the fact that the sign which will decide the validity of her prophetic-exegesis is deferred.

The ascription of 'prophet' is ultimately God-given, which explains why Cary may effectively speak and write as a prophet, but be unwilling, indeed unable, to claim the *name* of prophet for herself. From her texts, it is clear that Cary's evasiveness about prophecy focuses upon the fact that she has no right to the name. She describes herself as a servant of God, the corollary of which is that only God, as the master, possesses the authority to define the exact nature of her role.

Mary Cary's explication of Revelation's prophecies is not an attempt to superimpose an inflexible scriptural template upon

contemporary events. Instead, it is Cary's contention that issues of biblical hermeneutics are apposite for a seventeenth-century culture characterized by anxiety and uncertainty. She represents 'reader' and 'author' as negotiated rather than fixed categories. As I have argued, Cary's refusal to define herself as a prophet is in part politically motivated, a strategy to cultivate a sense of solidarity between herself and other nonconformist readers, who will be encouraged to follow her example rather than be intimidated by it. The political instability of mid-seventeenth-century England is itself partly constitutive of Cary's perception of herself as a servant of God, awaiting his adjudication of her work. We can say that her image of herself as an author and exegete is mediated by a combination of egalitarian principles and transcendental imperatives.

It is significant that Cary's strategies of evasion have little to do with passively acquiescing in the early modern teleology which equates femininity with inferiority. Her gender does not seem to be a factor in her construction of herself as an exegete. Although she argues: "It is not possible for Instruments to be silent, nor to sit still, when *God* hath spoken to them and given them commission to do his work," she does not qualify these "Instruments" as exclusively feminine.[41] It could be argued that Cary's meditation on the problems of reading neatly circumvents the problematic issue of a woman writer's entitlement to authority. Cary not only emphasizes that she is not a prophet, she is also aware of the discrepancies that lie within her texts, because they cannot claim divine provenance. Nevertheless, criticism of her work is preoccupied with the problems of femininity: in print, in religion and in culture.

(Not) The Write Stuff: The Gendered Reader in *The Account Audited*

The anonymous author of *The Account Audited* (1649) questions the legitimacy of Cary's text *The Resurrection of the Witnesses*. Given the type of criticism which *The Account Audited* levels at Cary, the text can be regarded as a masculine performance, which renders the actual gender of the author irrelevant. In particular, the author disputes the methodology used by Cary in her calculations of the date of the end of the witnesses' prophesying "clothed in sackcloth," at which point they were killed by the beast and then resurrected (Revelation 11:3-12). These events are the precursor to the time when God "shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth:" unbelievers and antichristian forces(11:18).

The author represents himself as the hungry reader, one of a fragmented and persecuted community of protestant faithful who devour texts such as Cary's with "much greedinesse and expectation." The metaphorization of food we saw earlier in Daniel and Revelation is deployed here to emphasize the degree to which readers spiritually 'invest' in a text like *The Resurrection* since they, like the author, very much want to believe that the chronology of events described in Revelation is underway. He remarks that dating the resurrection of Revelation 11's two witnesses is "the Key to unlock the Controversies of the Text," but closer inspection of Cary's text reveals her claims to be "misplaced," which "serv'd only to check my expectation."[42]

As the title suggests, the author has evaluated the text and judged it to be erroneous, but what is of interest is how his perception of Cary's alleged failure as a writer reveals assumptions about the relationship between gender and intellect. He contends that Cary is wrong because her claim that the date of the witnesses' resurrection

is April 5th, 1645 is premature by two hundred years. One might reasonably ask how he identifies the year 1845 with such certainty. Upon what basis does the author contest Mary Cary's text? The authority for this derives from the consensus reached by a succession of eminent historians. Their shared conviction that 1845 is the year of the witnesses' resurrection may be regarded as conclusive, because it is a hypothesis tested and vindicated by the scholarship of university-educated, professional scholars.

The anonymous author suggests two explanations as to why Cary got her dates wrong. He writes: "Peradventure the Author might have read in some History book, the year 404 misprinted for 604." A single printer's error could conceivably result in a miscalculation of two hundred years. However, the author's next remark apparently contradicts this possibility: "though I have not yet met with that misprint in any one of those Treatises, or in any of those Editions, which I have sought out and diligently compared on set purpose." He does not deny the potentially confusing consequences of errors created in the printing process: what he does seem to be arguing is that in this case, it is more probable that the *reader*, rather than the printed text, is negligent.

The author's alternative explanation reinforces this implicit suggestion. He speculates that Cary did not read one particular historian, Phocas, in whose reign, we are told, the Beast of Antichrist received his power. Like the other sources the author of *The Account* refers to, Phocas' chronicle confirms that the witnesses will be resurrected during the nineteenth century. Instead of consulting this significant text herself, Cary "only received it upon hearsay, and so she might either have mistook the Relator, or swallowed down the relators mistake; and this later conjecture I look

upon as the most probable in that it suits best with her own words; for shee does not say, as historians write; but *as say Historians.*"[43]

The image of Cary credulously 'swallowing' information which she obtains from a secondary, possibly dubious source and makes no attempt to substantiate is another digestive/assimilative metaphor which is juxtaposed with the author's representation of the community of the faithful as readers whose hunger for a sign of God's imminent victory over their enemies does not mean that they confuse heavenly manna with seductive but ultimately insubstantial (wo)man-made confections. The judicious reader, "who wilt own the truth in these times," is figured as an exemplary figure for English protestants, to whom print culture presents manifold possibilities for error and falsehood.[44]

It seems central to the author's argument that Cary's alleged errors are regarded not as involuntary (as would be the case if a relevant detail in a text she had read was corrupt) but as the inevitable consequences of a purposeful mode of reading. Although the initial explanations for the two hundred year difference could be said to excuse Cary--a printing error,inaccuracies from a source--they are qualified in each case, leaving the reader in no doubt at all that Cary could and should have read more widely and diligently, embarked upon a study of the relevant historical scholarship and, in total, ensured that her work would stand up to scrutiny before it reached the printing presses.

Further on in the text, the author has similar reservations about Cary's claim that April 5th 1645 was a vitally important day for the New Model Army. Again, he takes it upon himself to undertake some research, reading through numerous reports of the army's activities for that day but finding nothing significant. As he did with the

historians, the author contrasts Cary's assertions against a consensus of views. Was it credible that only Cary could have noticed something remarkable about April 5th, he queries, "at that time, when the observations of so many were at work about the new model."[45] The point about the author's use of his own scholarly skills to point out Cary's assumed faults is that, rather than being merely ingenuous, it betrays deliberate ostentation.

An interesting point is the author's focus upon Cary's grammatical construction "*as say Historians.*" Consistent with his general argument, he perceives this as symptomatic of Cary's negligence regarding historical sources, but his remarks are indicative of just how far *The Account* has shifted from being concerned with a numerical error to inserting itself into the cultural debate about women and education.

The author implies that, because Cary's knowledge is derived at least in part from oral sources, it lacks the legitimacy of knowledge attained within formal institutions of learning. A text enters print culture as a commodity of uncertain value: it is assessed by readers according to the agreed criteria for what constitutes 'literature.' Cary is assumed to be aware of these rules, but she is figured as a woman who flagrantly chooses to ignore them. Ironically, she submits to the public gaze a text which, speculum-like, exposes her own deficiencies as a reader and duplicities as an author.

But this argument is a tautological one. It contends that the 'misinterpretations' in *The Resurrection of the Witnesses* are a product of Cary's intentional refusal to conform to consensual writing practices. But the author omits to consider how the cultural limits on women's education effectively disenfranchizes any woman attempting to define herself as an author. The advanced learning the

author regards as a pre-requisite for proficiency in writing is only available to men who undertake a university degree.

The regulatory apparatus of textual production which the author of *The Account* continuously reiterates as 'consensual' is, in fact, androcentric. Its effect is to destabilize the notion of a woman writer by representing her as a simulacrum of the 'authentic' male erudite, imprinting the notion of 'author' as a masculine category. Hence, the author of *The Account* refers to Cary's text as a "pretended demonstration."[46] The gendered teleology his argument relies upon cannot conceive of Cary as anything other than a fraud. It does not allow for the possibility of Cary *choosing*, as a writer who is denied professional academic training because of her gender, to locate her subjectivity beyond the male-defined space of erudition and authorship.

By acknowledging her historical sources as oral or received rather than written or canonical, Cary possibly questions the convention which privileges 'written history' over 'oral history.' Does Cary identify with the oral transmission of knowledge because her experience as a woman writer meant she was conscious of being denied access to 'high' literate culture? Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss have noted that:

> since women are cut off from their own history through exclusion from print culture and literary traditions, they cannot so easily particularize a historical relation to the archetypes and myths by which representations of them as women are constructed. This limits the means by which they can unsettle such paradigms concerning themselves, but does not foreclose all strategies in exposing representations as constructions,

not givens.

Brant and Purkiss suggest that women can exploit "print's dialogue with oral culture" as a means of gaining entry into print.[47] Precisely because the printing press constitutes an interface between elite and popular culture, literacy and orality, the production and consumption of texts, interstices within its structure enable women who lack the requisite scholastic credentials to create a gendered subject within the discourses of print. They can therefore challenge what Merry Weisner calls the "male intellectual structures" which dominate the ontological infrastructure of early modern culture.[48]

Print culture was accessible to anyone with a text to publish who could raise sufficient money to cover production costs: it constituted a discursive space in which patriarchy's usual rules for admission were relaxed or at least negotiable. The literalism and vernacular tone of Mary Cary's text provokes such obloquy in the author of *The Account* because it represents a potentially disruptive voice to the custodians of 'high' literate culture.

It has already been argued that prophetic utterance problematizes any distinction between textuality and orality. As a linguistic mode, does it therefore facilitate entry from oral culture to print culture for early modern women? To try to answer this question, I want to consider the phenomenon of Christian glossolalia or 'speaking in tongues.' Glossolalia is perhaps the most extreme form of prophetic language, characterised by apparently random and cross-linguistic utterance. It has been defined as "language-like sounds which are sometimes heard by others as speech in a foreign tongue."[49] This 'foreigness' is not, however, explicable to the listeners as a

specific alien language. The strange tongues are 'delivered' by an individual who apparently has no personal involvement with the experience of tongue-speaking. Ecstatic transfigurations of the body are unlikely to occur. What authorizes the strange tongues is not the 'excessive' emotion of a conversion-type experience but how they 'sound.' The speaker addresses the audience as the voice of God, not as an intermediary. For the duration of the utterance, the speaker is perceived to constitute a channel for a divinely-generated message.

Biblical authority for speaking in tongues is in the main located in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, chapters twelve to fourteen. Paul speaks of what he called the nine spiritual gifts, including prophecy, miracles, healing and tongue-speaking and its interpretation. Paul is concerned that the early churches were becoming somewhat over-enthusiastic about prophesying and tongue-speaking. He instructs the faithful to interpret every manifestation of tongues, so that it might be used for the benefit of the entire congregation and prevent accusations that the churches were merely indulging excessive zealotry. Paul reveals his anxiety about the ambiguity inherent in tongue-speaking. To be beneficial tongues must be translated. Paul seems to regard prophecy as more valuable: "I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater *is* he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying" (1 Corinthians 14:5).

Glossolalia is an artificial term used for the purposes of scholarship and research: it is never used by the religious communities in which it occurs. It should also be noted that glossolalia is not a unified phenomenon. The perceived meanings of

glossolalia are not only specific to the religious group which experiences it, but speakers and audiences within a group may recognize different types of glossolalic event, with distinct functions and meanings.

A number of recent studies have persuasively argued against analysing glossolalia within such limited contexts as abnormal psychology, sociological effects and linguistic structures. Russell Proctor has pointed out that reading glossolalia as a rhetorical strategy allows us to understand tongue-speaking from the perspective of its users (speakers and audiences), thus affording us a sense of what he calls the "persuasive functions" of glossolalia within religious groups.[50] On the basis of research conducted within Pentecostal communities in Indiana and Missouri, U.S.A. during 1979-82, Elaine Lawless has argued that glossolalia constitutes a sign system for Pentecostals. As an acceptable, even conventional element of their religious services, tongue-speaking demonstrates the praxis of Pentecostal notions about God as a transcendent deity who can, nevertheless, descend into the human realm of lived experience. Glossolalia "tells them something about the performer, and reinforces something they want to 'know' about God. They know he is transcendent, but they also know he is *real* and can be experienced."[51]

In a similar vein, Thomas Szasz has argued that by classifying the language of schizophrenics as a symptom of their illness, namely as a 'thought disorder,' psychiatrists render schizophrenics' use of language incomprehensible and meaningless. Szasz conflates both 'schizophrenese' and glossolalia as categories generated by two hegemonic world views, medicine and theology. He rejects the notion that either world view is authoritative, preferring to interpret the

terminology of each as strictly utilitarian. Stripped of their pejorative connotations, glossolalia and schizophrenese are examples of how individuals use language when practising religion or madness. In the same way, psychiatric terminology is the language individuals adopt when they practice as clinicians.

Szasz argues that interpreting glossolalia and schizophrenese as meaningless "*prejudices* the phenomena by defining them as non-motivated actions--that is not behaviour but happenings."[52] He contends that it is fallacious to regard language as a symptom of chemical imbalances inside the brain, since "Language is a form of self-expression." The fact that an individual may speak in what appears to be an "unconventional" linguistic mode does not render it nonsense.[53] Szasz's point is that if someone's speech is not intelligible to us, the conclusion we should reach is not that the speaker has failed to make sense (evincing his or her 'disordered' thought processes) but that we have failed to understand.

If Szasz, Lawless and Proctor approach glossolalia as a nonarbitrary, purposeful and above all meaningful linguistic and behavioural mode, this poses the question of how strange tongues are interpreted. Is glossolalia 'decoded' into the vernacular, or does its linguistic otherness remain untranslated, as a measure of its divine provenance? Can we identify any gender differences in the phenomenon of glossolalia? Lawless's research is suggestive here. She finds that more women than men speak in tongues, whereas men are more likely to interpret the tongues. She cites one instance where a woman beginning to speak in tongues is drowned out by the "booming voice" of a male interpreter. His version of events supersedes her attempt to speak, even though her words (and not his) are understood to be generated by God. In theory, this fact should privilege her

utterance over his. It doesn't.[54]

Lawless suggests that this interruption is indicative of the gender dynamics of Pentecostal communities, which perpetuate the notion that women should be subject to male authority. Women are perceived to be more receptive to the spirit because they are 'closer to nature;' they are also more likely to be display ecstatic behaviour. Whereas men, who exemplify rationality and culture, act as interpreters. They fulfill the role Paul saw as critical: *more* important than the tongue-speaking itself. Lawless remarks that Pentecostals regard: "the actual English language message from God to be of greater and more rational importance than the 'unknown language' of the tongues themselves."[55]

Bearing in mind the provisos, that not every religious group reacts to a glossolalic event by translating it, and that what glossolalia signifies appears to be specific to the particular circumstances and practices of each group, Lawless's findings nevertheless reveal how power is negotiated across the interface between gender and prophecy. As a linguistic mode, prophecy is not intrinsically 'feminine,' but the fact that, as a category, prophecy becomes identified with the irrationality and excess emotion of a putatively female piety may make prophecy more accessible to women than other forms of public utterance. Consequently, prophecy might enable women's entry into print culture because it represents a point of confluence between oral and literate discourses.

But as both Lawless's remarks and *The Account Audited* demonstrate, gender asymmetries ensure that women's prophetic utterance is never self-authorizing. Even in the case of glossolalia, where the 'otherness' of the language explicitly differentiates it from other religious and secular forms of utterance, the audience's response to

a message which, by consensus, is understood as 'pure' (because most approximate to the voice of God) is to construe it within a hermeneutic process which is 'unpure' by comparison. If this paradox lies at the heart of the relationship between prophets and their hearers, it is notable that the influential position is occupied by the male interpreter, for whom the woman prophet and her text become objects of specularity.

This scrutiny operates within seventeenth-century print culture, regardless of whether the prophecy is authorized or not. The anonymous author of *The Account* measured Mary Cary against the standards of masculine erudition and literary competence, and found exactly what it was he wanted to see: Cary's failure to meet the criteria of a literary author. Because she was 'insensible' during the prophetic episodes which prostrated her body, Anna Trapnel's spiritual songs are recorded by a number of transcribers. The published texts call attention to their documentary status.

At certain points during the prophetic outpourings which were published as *A Voice For The King Of Nations* (1658), Trapnel's speech becomes very rapid, and the transcriber simply cannot keep up. This is represented not as a failure of the text, but as evidence of its authenticity: the precious nature of what *has* been set down on paper is emphasized. Trapnel herself addresses the transcriber: "If thy pen hath written it down,/I shall be very glad,/Because the power of God this day,/Greatly the Psalm hath clad."[56] Here, Trapnel emphasizes that God is the 'author' of the spiritual psalm which she has just delivered. She (or rather God) authorizes the recording of the text.

Her transcriber(s)' perception of their function exceeds that of a secretary and resembles more closely the role of an editor.

Commentaries and titles for Trapnel's prophecies are provided, as interventions between the text and its audience to influence the reader's interpretation of the prophecies. We are told the precise times at which the revelations occurred, who was present, provided with explications of the prophecies and advised about other events which collaborate the prophecies. On the 12th of November, 1657, Trapnel delivers what the editors entitle the "Psalm against the Quakers." The night before, we are told, she experienced a vision in which she saw a lamb and a cockatrice (a mythological beast). The cockatrice tries to attack her with its teeth and claws "and against me did talk."[57] The cockatrice is explicated as representative of the Quakers, who attend the following day's anti-Quaker prophecy and vociferously challenge Trapnel. The lamb in the vision (Christ) protects Trapnel from the cockatrice's assault. The editors of *Voice For The King* point out to the reader how Trapnel's prophecy reveals the errors of Quaker belief. "You may read victory," the editors assert, noting how the visiting Quakers departed in a state of anger, because Trapnel's prophecies could not be disputed.[58]

The apparent documentary-style opacity of the text does not bear scrutiny: as an author, Trapnel is de-centred, the text's 'real' author being God. The prophecies themselves are mediated by editorial strategies which are prescriptive of a specific kind of interpretation. It is implied that "victory" can only be "read" by means of careful, deliberate positioning of Trapnel's prophecies within a combination of credible eyewitness testimony and professional editing.

In each case, judging Mary Cary as a 'bad' prophet and Anna Trapnel as an authentic one suggest the redundancy of women as readers. Cary, we are told, flagrantly broke the rules which govern reading practice

and, as a result, produced a text riven with historical inaccuracies. Trapnel is never figured as an interpreter, but as a woman whose speech is interpreted. Neither author nor reader, Trapnel 'pours forth' language and it is the role of observers to collect her words and explicate them. What is being implied is that while it is unnecessary for women to read, men need to be competent readers as far as women are concerned, because what to do about women is in a sense a hermeneutical problem, which poses a challenge (and a serious threat) to men's rationalist sensibilities. What does this tell us about the opportunities prophecy offers women as an entry into print culture? It is surely that as long as women are constructed by a language that constitutes part of the ideological apparatus of patriarchy, their attempts to become speakers, readers and agents will be subject to containment.

Consequently, it is necessary to qualify an evaluation of the Bible and the printing presses as empowering resources available to seventeenth-century women. For a number of women writers during the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, print culture and the Bible became the foci for debate about women's access to educational and economic opportunities.[59] What is interesting about this debate is its engagement with issues of language and hermeneutics. In particular, there is the recognition that to contest their role as the objects of interpretation, women needed to appropriate strategies of interpretation for themselves. If the Bible constitutes the principle authority for women's subjugation, it becomes necessary for women writers to create new readings of putatively 'misogynistic' scriptural texts. I will begin my discussion of the work of Mary Astell, Margaret Fell Fox and M.M. with some remarks on the contemporary debate about implementing inclusive

language into the liturgy of the Church of England as a way of thinking about the relationship between religion, gender and politics.

Uses and Abuses: Gender and Inclusive Language

Far from being merely a subject for philosophical discussion, inclusive language constitutes something of an on-going debate within Christianity. It is re-ignited each time the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches publish updated or new versions of liturgical texts. It is therefore a highly topical debate, one which participants on both sides feel strongly about. Religious language is only one of the sites in which the merits of inclusive language is debated, but it is certainly one of the most vigorously contested.

Advocates of inclusive language argue that the use of the generic 'he' and 'man' when speaking about humanity excludes women, effectively making women invisible within linguistic structures. Therefore, use of generics (what is sometimes called 'he-man' language) is defined as *exclusive*. Those who oppose inclusive language argue that we all implicitly recognize that the generic refers to humanity in its entirety, not just *man*kind. They contend that replacing 'he' and 'man' with 'they' or 'people' is therefore unnecessary. But are generic categories as innocuous as they initially appear? Linda Thomas argues that the consequences of using generic categories exceeds the negation of the female. As she asserts: "Exclusive language confirms the androcentric view of the world as male...In a male-as-norm world view, female is automatically different, deviant, unusual. And such androcentricism

does not just belong to the domain of sex-specific terms. Confirmation of the culture as androcentric is evident from the male-as-norm meaning which creeps in to what should be neutral terms."[60] Airliners advertising their business-class services, for example, usually represent their customers as City males in suits. It is by no means uncommon to see members of professions, natives of individual countries and even what one might think of as the most neutral category of all, 'adults,' gendered as masculine.

One example where inclusive language has been introduced is the modificàtion of the 'mission statement' which precedes the opening credits on the science fiction television series *Star Trek*. In the original series, filmed in the 1960s, James T. Kirk (William Shatner) says: "These are the voyages of the Star Ship *Enterprise*, her continuing mission to explore strange new worlds and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." The 1980s-90s series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* altered this statement. When Patrick Stewart's Jean-Luc Picard articulates the *Enterprise's* mission, he replaces "her" with "its" and "no man" with "no-one." This recognizes that the original version of the mission statement gives the impression of a feminine ship populated by an entirely male crew which, of course, was never the case.

It might be thought that *Star Trek* is a relatively spurious example when compared to the question of whether Christian liturgical texts should be modified to eliminate generic categories. But *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is a product of cultural attitudes towards language and meaning which are evidently very different from those which circulated at the time the original series was being produced. In the same way, when the Catholic church published a new translation of the catechism in 1994, its decision to remove inclusive categories

from the text (thus creating a 'he-man' catechism) was a response to cultural discourses about the relations between language and symbolic meaning even if, ultimately, it chose to reject the implications of this relationship.[61]

Attempts to implement inclusive language within religion have been made by writers such as Naomi Goldenburg, who has argued that theology constitutes the study of a God who is exclusively male.[62] The discipline of *thea*logy which arose from this recognition is a study of the Goddess, a God who is defined in female terms. But thealogy is not about simply replacing one gender category for another. As an analytical model, it enables feminist writers to interrogate the uses of theological language. Beverley Clack argues that when we speak about God, we use a language which reflects human concerns and values. If we apprehend God as masculine, we inevitably associate that masculinity with its symbolic meanings. Masculinity is a linguistic construct that refers to cultural and historical concepts of maleness. To say God is masculine is to impute masculine concerns and interests onto him. The use of the inclusive term "God/ess," Clack suggests, enables men as well as women to find new ways of thinking about God which are not dependent on stereotypes of masculinity.[63]

A common factor linking theological issues such as rewriting the Lord's Prayer or applying feminine pronouns to God with more banal instances like the changes to the *Star Trek* mission statement, is that as strategies promoting inclusive language, they appear to provoke hostile and defensive reactions. What are being articulated are anxieties about language becoming debased. The arguments against inclusive language are not confined to seeing it as trivial, irrelevant or unnecessary. Inclusive language is often associated

with the linguistic form of what is termed equality of opportunity in Britain and in America is called affirmative action: so-called 'political correctness.' In the late twentieth century, political correctness has become a term of opprobrium, to the extent that the egalitarian motives behind the institution of non-discriminatory language have become obscured.

What is interesting about the opposition to inclusive language is the way that language is represented as threatened, under attack or even in mortal danger. Political correctness is often satirized (one infamous example is 'follically challenged'), but less hilariously, it is also blamed for rendering the English language sterile and arid. It is not just religious language which is understood as sacred and under threat, although, as one might expect, the perceived threat of changes to a prayer or use of the female pronoun to address God is regarded by opponents as a heinous crime.

The feminist theologian Jann Aldredge Clanton receives an angry response when she tries to persuade one man of the legitimacy of applying female pronouns and imagery to God: "I would feel angry--insulted--God is a male. Jesus said that if you have seen me you have seen the Father. Women should be flattered to be feminine. And I don't think that they would want to be God."[64] This individual regards what Jesus said (i.e., what the Bible tells us he said) as absolute proof of God's masculinity, which no-one has the right to deny. If someone does, this man feels personally injured. The crucial comment is his assertion that women "would [not] want to be God." It is difficult to understand how a woman's use of feminine imagery to contemplate God correlates to her aspiring to *be* God (do men, apprehending a masculine deity, therefore desire to be God?) For the purposes of his argument, however, the key point is that the woman who is not

"flattered" to be feminine is regarded as unnatural. God is represented as the sign of absolute masculinity. To read 'him' otherwise is to usurp his masculinist role. Clanton's respondent interprets women's attempt to situate God beyond the terms of masculinity as a deviant reading.

The vehemence of some of the opposing voices to what is referred to as political correctness and inclusive language raises the question of why it is represented in such emotive terms as a violation. What exactly is being violated? Linda Thomas has argued: "It is impossible to inflict pain and suffering on a language. Languages cannot be abused, only their users."[65] What the debate about inclusive language demonstrates is that women constitute a marginalized group within language. As "users" and participants of religion, they are abused because the language which constructs ritual, in the form of the liturgy, fails to recognize their existence. Christianity is a verbal religion, in which words are used to develop an awareness of God. Therefore, what sort of words used in religion is not an irrelevancy, but absolutely central.

In and of itself, language is neither neutral nor static. Whenever efforts are made to convince us that it is, or should be, we need to be aware of the motives of the dominant social group in whose interests it is to represent language in those terms. As Sara Maitland has remarked: "limits on language really are limits on thought, and on the capacity to act."[66] This seems particularly appropriate for our understanding of the seventeenth-century women pamphleteers who addressed the subject of religious language as a source of women's subjugation. A common factor to both early modern petitioners and the advocates of inclusive language is the recognition that the prerequisite for women's access to educational and economic

opportunity is a language which facilitates the construction of feminine subjectivities rather than disabling them.

Pamphlet Culture: Petitions, Prophecy and Women

The Athenian Mercury, an English periodical which began publication in 1690, debated in one issue whether or not it was appropriate for women to prophesy. It conceded that prophetic utterance such as song or prayer could be manifested in women, but that women were prohibited from giving religious instruction "because that Office is plainly restrained to the *Men*." The *Mercury's* editors argued that women were incapable of producing "a Doctrine or an Interpretation," because this was solely a masculinist prerogative.[67] As we have seen, the notion that biblical hermeneutics was an activity only men were qualified to engage in was highly persistent during the early modern period.

One of the aims of this chapter has been to collapse the distinction between oral and textual prophecy, and to suggest that the term 'prophecy' should be understood to have a very broad range of applications and meanings during this period. Deciding whether or not a writer such as Mary Cary constitutes a prophet involves engaging with such concepts as authorship, textuality and interpretation. From a critical perspective, this problematizes a distinction between writers like Mary Astell who petitioned for the rights of women and women prophets like Anna Trapnel, since the appropriation and/or ascription of comparable roles and functions may be identified in each case. Although she occupied a role which emphasized vacuity and passivity, Trapnel at times adopts the explicitly gendered and political voice of protofeminist writers

like Astell.

Nevertheless, there are differences in the early modern *perception* of women as prophets and petitioners. When women petitioned in print on behalf of their sex, they were responding to a textual tradition of misogyny which was perpetuated in both popular and intellectual works. While the urgency of the woman prophet's message and her status as an involuntary channel justified breaking the mandate that women should remain silent, the pamphleteer was a self-conscious author and advocate of women. She attempted to recover her gender, rather than emphasize its absence during the period of prophetic utterance. As we have seen, in 'mediated' prophetic texts such as the edited versions of Anna Trapnel's experiential outpourings, both the editors and the prophet herself collude in representing the prophetic body as radically different from the conscious, genderd self. The troublesome aspects of femininity, such as loquacity, unruly behaviour and emotionality, which could potentially invalidate the prophecy, are neutralized by virtue of the fact that the self is absent. This sexual self is replaced by a 'positive' construct of femininity: de-sexed, meek, subservient and dependent on God and on masculine staging of the prophecies.

As a case of 'unmediated' prophecy, the career of Eleanor Davies is notable for the way in which Davies' understanding of her role as a prophet is not based on the assumption that prophetic activity is defined as self-contained episodes. Apart from her initial 'induction' into prophecy (discussed in the second chapter) and several subsequent visions, Davies does not seem to experience transcendent bodily phenomena such as trances or outbursts of song or prayer. Given that Davies writes and publishes her prophetic writings herself, how she chooses to represent herself is

significant. Once she was 'turned on' to prophecy, Davies saw no reason to limit or specify the perimeters of the prophetic role. In *A Warning to the Dragon and all his Angels* (1625), she comments that prophecy is "an office not a trade."[68] She is claiming that the prophets are ordained by God, but by representing it as a profession transcending the mundanity of human labour, Davies also implies that prophecy is self-justifying.

Her prophetic activity took many forms: she predicted deaths of prominent figures, such as the Duke of Buckingham would not survive past August 1628 (he was assassinated), she in effect threatened both her husbands with the dire consequences of burning her texts and trying to force her to behave in a more politic fashion, she criticized Charles I and his papist wife, Henrietta Maria, and she explicated passages in Daniel and Revelation. As she herself admits, Davies saw little need to define or explain her prophetic abilities: "neither being curious whether these came to her eare, indeavouring rather to unlocke or open the meaning of that."[69] Unlike Mary Cary, who is continually anxious to qualify her interpretations and who advises her reader to exercise a similar caution, Davies never doubts herself.

How prophecy was received in the court and on the streets of seventeenth-century England depended in part on its perceived appropriateness to specific circumstances. Under certain conditions, prophecy was a tolerated, even sanctioned, phenomenon; under others, it was transgressive. When Davies predicted the death of Henrietta Maria's son, who died within a day of his birth in March 1629, this was understandably unwelcome news and the aristocratic prophetess appeared as a cross between between a gloomy Cassandra and a witch. When Davies' predictions of deaths came true and she began to

appear alarmingly accurate, her audience at court was no longer amused by the flamboyant figure of the prophesying Lady, and began to shun her presence.

In terms of appropriateness, then, Davies exceeded the limits of (to quote Olivia in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*) 'allowed' prophecy. Instead, Davies incorporates her prophetic "office" into every aspect of her private and public life: as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and stern critic of the spiritual and political deterioration of the English state. To take an example, it may appear strange from a modern perspective that Davies invokes her authority as a prophet to comment upon the notorious and scandalous case of her brother Mervin, Earl of Castlehaven's, trial for rape and sodomy in 1631. In *The Crying Charge* (1649), she refutes all the evidence and, in particular, condemns Mervin's wife, Lady Anne, who was the victim of rape and gave evidence for the trial. Davies accuses her of being: "*a common Whore her husbands accuser*" (Anne did not attend the court in person, due to the trauma of the rape).[70] Mervin is represented as a martyr who "*had declined popery*" and died the victim of a papist conspiracy.[71]

Davies' vitriol against her sister-in-law may strike us as tasteless or even outrageous, but what it demonstrates is that Davies recognized no sense of decorum or propriety regarding prophecy: she challenged the perimeters within which prophetic activity was legitimate bahaviour. Since she 'owned' the role of prophet, she therefore had the right to direct that role to whatever purpose she wished. As a woman prophet whose 'public image' was not mediated either by editors or elders or ministers within a sectarian group, Davies determined herself both the authority invested in her prophetic role and how she was represented in print. This suggests a

point of comparison with women petitioners and pamphleteers, who argued for at least partial autonomy from patriarchy in issues of education, religion and morality. The pamphleteer was an unmediated female voice. It required different strategies from those which represented the exemplary woman prophet as vacuous and passive.

'Nor is she quite so guilty as some think:' Scriptural Exegesis, Proto-Feminist Hermeneutics and the Redemption Of Eve

In *The Restitution of Reprobates*, a tract she published in July 1644, Eleanor Davies offered reassurance to those who dreaded their fate as the end of the world drew closer. She argued that dispensing such comfort was: "most *proper* to be done by that *Sex*: a Woman being the occasion of the worlds woe and undoeing: *Therefore this* PLAISTER or PARDON by *a Womans hand.*"[72] It is hardly surprising that seventeenth-century women internalized the idea that Eve was a guilty figure who was representative of her sex. Genesis was the primary justification for women's subjugation: Eve being *the* catastrophic example of the consequences of allowing women to dominate their husbands. Specific texts in the Bible were appropriated and extrapolated from in order to legitimize the restrictions on women's social roles and functions. The Genesis story and Paul's letters to the Corinthians and to Timothy constituted the majority of evidence for the case for the prosecution against women.

In a culture where religious authority had to be improvised, the early modern Bible was necessarily perceived as a palimpsest or collection of texts by different authors. Both theologians and lay readers were no less conscious of scripture's ambiguities and

internal contradictions than the supposedly 'sophisticated' modern reader. But what early modern women had to confront was the totalizing and persistent authority of misogyny. Paul's instruction to the church at Corinth to subdue its women was absolute, authoritative and undeniable, because the Bible was the sacred word of God. This meant that writers who advocated increased educational provision for women, for instance, could not ignore the almost totemic quality of the biblical authorities which were perceived to invalidate their arguments. The question of whether or not the Bible is misogynistic misses the point, which is that the idea of scripture as a cohesive text is an illusion. The strategic deployment of a biblical text to authorize a specific argument involves transplanting that text out of its proximity of other scriptural texts, which may potentially argue a contradictory position. The excised text therefore becomes the justification for often inflammatory misogynistic writings, and is presumed to have as much authority as if the entire Bible was being invoked. The authoritative nature of biblical texts which legitimized female subjugation poses the question of how women writers responded to them. Were alternative (in the sense of 'more positive') conceptions of Eve available to seventeenth-century women? Did women writers develop innovative ways of reading and interpreting the Bible?

Mary Astell was an Anglican conformist who argued that the cultural restrictions on women's access to education had pronounced moral consequences. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1695), Astell suggests that patriarchy arrests women's development as moral agents by representing the feminine sensibility as transparent, its numerous sins visible and penetrable by the masculinist gaze. It is ironic, she says, that men "divert themselves with our Miscarriages"

when they themselves have often committed "greater faults." Astell refers to the conduct literature which is a product of this apparent all-seeing gaze. Although she stresses that she is not attempting to appropriate the role of the conduct book author and take it upon herself to correct the sins of men, her note on male assumptions effectively challenges their authority to police women's morality. They "either are, or at least *think* themselves too wise to receive Instruction from a Womans Pen."[73]

Astell does not claim that because men's sinfulness is equal or greater than women's, it necessarily means that women are unfairly accused. She asserts that deficiencies in education stunt the ability of women to develop moral capacities. The socialization of upper-class women, she argues, relegates them to a sort of moral stasis, thus forcing them to be dependent on men for moral guidance. To Astell, the cultivation of femininity is grossly unnatural and produces a woman whose humoral instability and rarefied manners make her vulnerable to sin:

> if from our Infancy we are nurs'd up in Ignorance and Vanity; are taught to be Proud and Petulant, Delicate and Fantastick, Humorous and Inconstant, 'tis not strange that the ill effects of this Conduct appear in all the future Actions of our Lives. And seeing it is Ignorance, either habitual or actual, which is the cause of all sin, how are they like to escape *this*, who are bred up in *that*?[74]

If women are sinful, Astell argues, it is not because they are descendents of Eve, the archetypal female sinner, but because they have been denied education, which fortifies an individual against

sin. A product of her culture, the weak, giddy woman lacks any defence against Satan. Astell's request to patriarchy on women's behalf is "permit us only to understand our *own* duty."[75] Her argument suggests the ambivalence regarding women's autonomy as spiritual and sexual beings. On the one hand, the Bible states that men and women are created equal before God, each possessing a soul (which would reinforce Astell's contention that women are responsible for their spiritual and moral health). But on the other, "enmity" was put between Adam and Eve, sanctioning the subjugation of women (Genesis 4:15).

Hilda Smith has noted that seventeenth-century women writers like Astell are "inconsistent." In the case of Astell, Smith argues that although she recognizes the gender/power asymmetries which maintained women's inferior position within marriage, religion and education, she stops short of advocating revolution as a means by which women could gain power. As an Anglican with conservative beliefs, Astell was horrified by the nonconformist radicals who threw off the yoke of the state.[76] Smith terms these women writers 'feminists.' I prefer 'protofeminist,' because although it is the case that Astell's arguments are inconsistent within the terms of feminism as a theorization of women's place within twentieth-century culture, they are consistent with seventeenth-century attitudes towards the Bible, gender and politics. Arguing from a modern perspective that Astell and women like her were 'not radical enough' ignores the historicity out of which their writings were produced. What Astell achieves is to represent some of the obstacles facing by women in their attempts to participate in cultural life. The fact that she does not advocate dismantling the existing social structure is not a flaw in her argument, but is actually understandable. Like

many others, Astell had seen England turned upside down during the years before the religious settlement of 1660. Even some advocates of radical change decided that order was preferable after they had experienced what life living in a nation 'turned upside down' was actually like.[77] Astell tried to synthesize a less radical solution to the issue of women's participation in education and religion, one which negotiated existing structures since, in the contemporary political and social climate, dismantling them and constructing new ones was not feasible.

Margaret Fell (who married the father figure of Quakerism, George Fox, in 1669) published *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures* in 1667. As the title suggests, this text addresses the prohibition in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that women should not be allowed to speak during religious assemblies. Fell uses a number of interpretative strategies to qualify Paul's instruction, namely in associating the noisy, unruly women in 1 Corinthians and the images of erotic, threatening femininity in Revelation with Roman Catholicism.

At the beginning of her text, taking her cue from Revelation 12:17, Fell insists that the events in Eden did not lead to an unholy alliance between Eve and the serpent, but made them enemies. She warns of the dire consequences if women who speak "in the Power of the Lord" are silenced, since this gives the serpent the opportunity to unleash its seductive whisper on the faithful. "It is manifest," she writes, "that those that speak against the Woman and her Seeds Speaking, speak out of the enmity of the old Serpents Seed."[78] The space left when women's voices are suppressed is quickly exploited by the devil.

Fell's defence of women's religious utterance is mainly based upon

a reappraisal of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. She argues that Paul's interdiction refers only to women who are transgressive, in that they disobey their husbands or wear inappropriately lavish clothing. Paul did not mean that women who prophesyed in God's name should be prevented from speaking. Only those women who "were in strife, confusion and malice in their speaking" should not be tolerated in public religious assemblies. Fell does not challenge the subjugation of the wife by her husband: the Bible forbids women to usurp male authority or to give religious instruction. But she contends that misogynists have "strained to the utmost" Paul's position to deny women from prophecy or preaching. Fell again insists that the intended object of Paul's instruction was immodest women, "exhorting them from broidered hair, gold, and pearls, and costly array." The Apostle was endeavouring to exhort these women to devote themselves to piety in a more decorous and submissive manner.[79]

Fell pursues this idea of exotic/erotic femininity disrupting the equilibrium of the church at Corinth by representing it as a papist archetype. She identifies apocalyptic figures of arrogant, monstrous women including the "bond woman" who rides on the seven-headed scarlet beast in Revelation 17 "that hath been speaking and usurping authority for many hundred years together."[80] Fell asserts that "the *Jezebel*, and the Woman...the great Whore, and tatling women, and busie-bodies" are rightly deplored by the "True Church," because they are generated by 'popery.' Fell imagines that the New Jerusalem will arrive in the form of a woman:

> she is coming down from Heaven, and her Light will shine throughout the whole earth, even as a *Jasper stone, clear as Christal*, which brings freedom and liberty, and perfect

> Redemption to her whole Seed; and this is that woman and Image of the Eternal God, that God hath owned, and will own for evermore.

Fell suggests that clamorous, unruly and materialistic women represent the false church, while women who are obedient and devout profess Godliness in all their actions. In Fell's interpretation, women are equal to man before God (who, she says, "made no difference, but gave his good spirit, as it pleased him both to Man and Woman") but this is a spiritual equality where women's subjugation is a prerequisite.[81] By equating the threat of popery with the unruly woman's transgression of sexual and linguistic mores, Fell ambiguously represents the authentic voice of the female prophet or preacher as manifested within the terms of civil, decorous speech while simultaneously violating those linguistic practices. Fell makes an interesting point about "blind priests" who traffic in women's words "to get money by, and take Texts, and Preach Sermons...and still cry out, Women must not speak," but is implicated herself in the ambivalent cultural attitudes towards women's appropriation of religious language: for by definition, the paragon of femininity who only speaks under masculine auspices, speaks only rarely.[82] Therefore, when a normally silent woman speaks in public during church meetings, she will inevitably be regarded as 'clamorous.' Fell essentially perpetuates the notion which tolerated the active participation in religious edification and instruction of a minority of 'exceptional' women, while relegating the majority to a position of pious inaudibility.

Astell and Fell's position in relation to the biblical texts which were perceived to exclude women from education and active roles in

religion is to understand them as absolutes which may to a degree permit limited opportunities for the recognition of women's participation or abilities. Astell argues that upper-class women can educate themselves out of the sinful legacy of Eve; Fell's reaction to Eve is to incriminate Catholics and immodest women as her descendents. But neither can imagine Eve as anything more than a slur on women. The radically different approach of the late seventeenth-century writer known only as M.M. (according to the British Library catalogue, the second 'M' stands for 'Mercin') suggests how impossible it is for women to carve out a niche for themselves within the perimeters of a religion defined by masculinist interests. To do so, it it is incumbent upon women to innovate: to create their own hermeneutical models and challenge the cultural primacy of male authority.

In *Two Remarkable Females* (1701), in common with nonconformists, M.M. argues that the Bible is in need of drastic restorative measures, as a result of being continually misinterpreted. However, her own view of this state of affairs implicates men as almost entirely responsible for deviating from "Scripture-Rule."[83] She subverts the notion of male superiority, which has traditionally excluded women from the production of knowledge. This alleged superiority has disguised the reality of male incompetence: men have been far from adequate custodians of religious truth.

M.M. presents herself as the second "remarkable female" (the first being the Virgin Mary). She imagines both women as constituting highly significant moments in the history of Christianity: while it is possible to question to what extent the Virgin exists as a model of femininity which ordinary women can emulate, M.M. herself anticipates a new age for women which will coincide with the arrival

of the New Jerusalem after the horrors of the apocalypse. For M.M., women's access to more active roles within religion will herald significant changes to their secondary position in relation to men. As an advocate of her sex, M.M. is concerned with the expansion of women's roles at a time when the greatest mistake is to be found 'unawares' by God. "O ye Women!" she writes, "be found in your Duty; now the word is given according to promise, that at the time of the end, knowledge should be increased; That you may prepare for, and Publish the coming of the Lord according to the Prophecie."[84]

For godly women to be prepared for the end of history and the benefits it would bring them, they needed to have sufficient knowledge and understanding to do God's work. Using the parable of the foolish virgins, M.M. argues that the culturally-defined notion of feminine piety as being essentially ignorant of theological and scriptural matters is redundant:

> I desire...that Women may be instructed how to read the Scriptures, so as to understand what they read. For what we do not understand, is a dead letter to us, and proves of much more dangerous consequence, by reason of the false Interpretations that have been put upon the Word. For God complains that his *People are destroyed for lack of knowledge*, Hos.4.6. And the foolish, tho' Virgins, are said to be shut out from the Wedding-Supper: For with Vertue is required Knowledge, 2 *Pet*.1.5.[85]

M.M. argues that women can no longer silently acquiesce in the judgement of men regarding religion: they must adapt to the pre-apocalyptic situation and take responsibility for their own spiritual health. She envisages these women not as empty, passive

vessels (a description more relevant to their condition prior to their spiritual emancipation), but as members of a feminine collective which works strenuously to repair the deterioration inflicted upon religious truth by "the Wise and Learned of this World."[86]

In her text *Good News to the Good Women*, also published in 1701, M.M. explicitly confronts the major scriptural precedents for women's subjugation. In the new age, she envisions a return to a state of prelapsarian bliss, where God "will not only restore, but secure all his People in that perfect state they were in before the Fall" where sin no longer exists "so as then the Husband will not be above the Wife, nor the Wife above the Husband." What the removal of original sin implies is a renunciation of gender inequalities. M.M. argues that women have suffered most by the events in Eden, since Eve "was first in the Transgression [and] Women have been laid under subjection in this time." This "bondage" of woman to man has constituted an "intollerable" burden to many women.[87]

Although M.M. follows the pro-feminist tradition of identifying examples of biblical 'good women' as a counter to the virulence of misogyny, this is not the extent of her tactics against the denigration of women. Men could recite a number of hackneyed biblical arguments to legitimize treating women as chattels, helpmates and, above all, as guilty Eves. But for M.M. it was not enough to create a utopian vision of the recovery of women's autonomy. She also addresses the texts upon which an accretion of antifeminist propaganda has gathered, re-reading them in her self-appointed role as proto-feminist hermeneut. M.M.'s primary strategy overcomes the apparently intractable problem of the Genesis story of the fall or Paul's prohibition of female speaking in church by not perceiving

them as absolutes. Instead, she integrates them back into the entire text of the Bible, demonstrating how other authors and texts contract, for example, Paul's position, and even instances where *Paul* contradicts Paul. This strategy undermines the idea that misogynistic attitudes are inevitable or fixed.

In her defence of Eve, M.M. takes her cue from 2 Corinthians 11:3, asserting that Eve could not be blamed for the fall of humanity, because she was beguiled by the serpent. Furthermore, because she shared the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge with Adam, she did not actually betray her husband. Insofar as Eve sinned, M.M. suggests, she did so involuntarily, with no knowledge of the consequences of her actions. M.M.'s attitude towards God's role as adjudicator of Eve's fault is highly ambivalent. She calls him "that Judg[e] that hath been so severe on the Womans side."[88] M.M. infers that God's judgement is open to dispute: she suggests that the punitive nature of the sentence is almost arbitrary. The punishment imposed upon one woman should not be seen as setting a precedent for the treatment of every woman descended from Eve.

For M.M., the faults of Eve radically differ from those she imputes to *man*kind (one instance where exclusive language is adequate). She interrogates the success or otherwise of the way that men have controlled and managed religion, politics and their own spiritual needs. Whereas M.M. invites women to join with her in optimistic anticipation of the new age, the future for men is not necessarily so rosy. Her advice is that: "Therefore it is best for [men] to consider, *and order their Conversation a right*, before it is too late, that they may not be reckoned as part of that *Vine that will be trod without the City, when the Lord comes.*"[89]

Her comment that men should regulate their "Conversation" is

particularly interesting: does she mean that in the last stages of history, the 'traditional' denigration of women has become an anachronism, which men must discard if they want to enter the ungendered world of the New Jerusalem? The diatribe against women and the androcentric theology which sustains it are no longer acceptable in the new order, where men will have to defend their domination of religion, culture and politics in the light of what M.M. identifies as glaring failures. Nor will men be able to implicate Eve's descendents for the deterioration in religious truth, by logical consequence of the fact that women have been excluded from participating in social process and organisation. Like the anonymous author of *The Female Advocate* (1686) (a response to Robert Gould's misogynistic satire), who saw Eve as a scapegoat with which those of Gould's persuasion "would adulterate all Womankind," M.M. identifies the ways in which patriarchy has fashioned an ideological stooge out of Eve.[90] But she adopts a mode of female utterance which, far from internalizing her shared heritage with guilty Eve, is almost jubilant: the time is imminent when men will no longer be able to implicate the sins of women and conceal their own.

As a reader of scripture, M.M. is prepared to distinguish between what she understands as the word of God and what is essentially man-made. In *Two Remarkable Females*, she remarks that: "we are not to take the Sayings of the Apostles in Contradiction to what God hath declared of himself...but in that method by which they do agree."[91] What might appear to seventeenth-century ears as an outrageous suggestion is made possible by the mode of comparative biblical reading which M.M. adopts. In *Good News*, she looks in detail at Paul's rules restricting women's participation within the church, which compelled women to defer to the teaching of their husbands (the sort

of position M.M. is trying to counter). She refuses to accept these precepts as absolutes for a number of reasons. Firstly, M.M. surmises that Paul was probably prejudiced in favour of the men at the Corinthian church, who were keen to learn about God. The women, who asked too many questions in church or at public meetings, irritated Paul to the extent that he thought they ought to be gagged. M.M. comments that the Corinthian women may have been "too troublesome" with their "impertinent questions."[92] Considering what M.M. thinks about men's investment in maintaining women's ignorance regarding religious issues, this "impertinence" is probably the result of enthusiasm which had previously lacked an outlet since it had never been stimulated. M.M. represents Paul as correspondent to Corinth as an exasperated man, who said that the place for women's questions was at home because at least there it could not interfere with church meetings.

Regarding the prohibition against women as teachers, M.M. points out that Paul has contradicted first himself (in Titus 2:3-5, he writes that older women should teach younger women how to behave appropriately) and also many other scriptural texts which *do* authorize woman's role as a teacher: for these reasons, Paul's precept is "of no force." She adds that women need to educate their husbands, should their spiritual knowledge be deficient. M.M. even attributes to Paul a degree of intellectual arrogance in dictating to the embryonic churches that they should "be *Followers of him, even as he is of Christ 1 Corinthians* 11.1 But the Churches are to follow none, but as they follow Christ."[93] Would Paul, M.M. demands, want to silence the four prophesying virgins of Acts 21.9, who lived during his lifetime? The only concession that she is prepared to make to Paul is that women should not teach or speak in "the great publicke

assemblies or Synagogues," although they may do so anywhere else.[94]

M.M.'s challenge to androcentric theology questions the cultural associations between language, gender and authority. She inverts the assumption which reads the meaning of women's utterance as local, trivial and insignificant, whilst according to the speech of men universal significance and relevance. She questions the enduring validity of Paul's injunction that women should remain silent, because such an absolute rule is being extrapolated from a local and specific incident of male exasperation. It is not that M.M. believes Paul is not entitled to become irritated, but rather that taking his pragmatic solution to a problem of order within one church as setting a precedent seems excessive.

M.M.'s description of the faults committed by men throughout their monopoly on the way society is organised is notable for its use of metaphors of contamination and pollution, normally reserved for speaking about women in biblical texts like Leviticus. She quotes from Ezekiel, Isaiah and Revelation, implicating men in the destruction of the natural order: "Eating the good Pastures, and in treading down the residue of the Pastures, and fouling the deep waters...man, by his *turning things upside down*...has laid the *World in Darkness, and made Merchandize of the Souls of the People.*"[95] By inverting cultural norms of gender and authority, and by turning one established system upside down, M.M. is able to reveal the chaos that men have inflicted upon the social system, which they have managed to conceal by scapegoating the figure of Eve *qua* woman. The Bible has been abused by men to justify their actions.

There is nothing radical in M.M.'s argument for the restoration of the Bible, an argument which was voiced by both academic theologians

and ordinary protestants. What does distinguish M.M. is her incorporation into this argument a theory of proto-feminist advocacy. She combines both the notion that in interpreting the Bible we should follow God and not man, with a plea that the women who serve God and communicate his message be acknowledged and included, not relegated into a position of invisibility. What is remarkable about M.M. is her incorporation of biblical exegesis within the context of proto-feminist hermeneutics. She provides her sex with a much-needed voice, one that seizes the existing hegemony of culture, language and gender, and subverts it.

Having explored the ways that readers and authors interacted with the seventeenth-century Bible, both as a resource for public and private religiosity, and as a focus for debate about gender, politics and education, the next chapter will examine the relations between the body and the text in accounts of inedia and miraculous healing. Do the manifestations of the body constitute a language, specifically, a gendered idiolect? Can women become subjects when their bodies become publically visible, or are their stories mediated as case histories?

Notes

1 A sixteenth-century case in point is that of Archbishop Thomas Cramner, whose attempts to encourage Bible reading co-existed with an anxiety about unmediated public access to scripture. See John R. Knott, who describes how the laity "read from the chained Bibles during services, loudly; they became disputacious; they expounded texts...in 1543, as a result of agitation by Stephen Gardiner and other conservative bishops, an act was passed forbidding the reading of the Bible by women, artificers, apprentices, and others of insufficient status. Only noblemen and gentlemen householders were allowed to keep a copy at home for the use of their families," *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 25.

2 In *The Divine Authority of The Scriptures Asserted*, John Goodwin debated the issue of whether, in an age of print and in the light of the proliferation of vernacular translations, the Bible could be understood as the 'pure' word of God and whether it needed to be protected. Goodwin argues that the Greek and Latin versions (or "Originalls" as he calls them) were not "in any speciall or extraordinary way given" to man by God: their *textuality* ("the letters, syllables, words, phrases, sentences, and periods of speech") denies their claim to be direct, unmediated communication from God. Regarding vernacular translations, there are "none of these, but which carry the manifest marks of humane oscitancie and weaknesse in them." But Goodwin does not regard the 'originals' as innately superior. On the contrary, all versions of scripture are "a mixture, or at least a tincture, of the word of men." (pp. 14-15). But

despite these inadequacies, Goodwin asserts that Bibles are "one of the greatest blessings that God ever vouchsafed unto the nations," teaching readers how they to lead a godly life, even if subsequent translations fail to grasp the "language and sameness of words" used by God when he issued commands to the writers of the Bible (p. 16). Acknowledging the fact that translating the Bible inevitably 'contaminates' the text while arguing for the centrality of scripture to religious belief, Goodwin concludes: "I both hold, and denie, as well the English Scriptures, as the Originals, to be the word of God" (p. 29), *The Divine Authority of The Scriptures Asserted* (London, 1649).

3 This account of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English protestantism is based on the following works: Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England. Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. The Third Anstey Memorial Lectures in the University of Kent at Canterbury. 12-15 May 1986* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970); Michael G. Finlayson, *Historians, Puritanism, and the English Revolution: the Religious Factor in English Politics before and after the Interregnum* (Toronto & London: University of Toronto Press, 1983); Ole Peter Grell *et al.*, *From Persecution to Toleration. The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism. Or, The Way to the New Jerusalem As Set Forth In Pulpit And Press From Thomas Cartwright To John Lilburne And John Milton, 1570-1643* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972); Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1993); --*A Nation*

of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England (London: Routledge, 199); --*Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986); John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); --*The Sword and the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); David Leverenz, *The Language of Puritan Feeling: An Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and Social History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980); J.F. McGregor & B. Reay, *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560-1662* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970); Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

4 William Haller argues that the Elizabethan reign's reluctance to implement radical reform constituted the principle galvanizing event for nonconformity, *The Rise of Puritanism*, p. 8.

5 John Field and Thomas Wilcox, *The Admonition to the Parliament* (1572), reprinted in W.H. Frere and C.E. Douglas (eds.), *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origins of the Puritan Revolt. With a reprint of the Admonition to the Parliament and kindred Documents, 1572* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1907), p. 19.

6 Barry Reay, 'Popular Religion' in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 106.

7 See Christopher Hill, 'Antichrist and his Armies' in *The English*

Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1993), pp. 314-323.

8 Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 655.

9 Richard Baukham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 251-2.

10 Ibid, p. 253.

11 C. Fischler, ' Food, Self and Identity,` *Social Science Information* 27 (2), 275-292 (p. 279) quoted in Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: SAGE, 1996), p. 16.

12 S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York & London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 154-5 quoted in Lupton, *Food, The Body and the Self*, p. 35.

13 See Anon, *The Description of a Puritan* (1640), a pseudo-Marprelate tract which identifies the Puritan as carrying "at his Belt a buff clad Bible bears,/stampt with the true *Genevah* Characters," reprinted in A. Sasek (ed.), *Images of English Puritanism: A Collection of Contemporary Sources 1589-1646* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 118.

14 See John R. Knott, who comments that the inclusion of a reading guide in the Geneva Bible "expresses in diagrammatic form...what came to be a typical Puritan emphasis on applying the Bible systematically to every aspect of daily life," *The Sword and the Spirit*, p. 32.

15 Richard Hooker, *Of The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, eight books, (London, 1593), VIII, p. 7.

16 Richard Baxter, *The Christian Directory* (London, 1673), p. 580.

17 Ibid, p. 579.

18 Ibid, p. 580.

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Chapter Four:

Textual Bodies:

Science, Religion

and Consumption in Early Modern England

To Be Some Body: The Scandalous Case of Eva Vliegen

In 1634, Sir William Brereton of Handford, Chester, travelled to the Netherlands. In his account of his picaresque adventures, *Travels in Holland*, he describes his visit to a place called the 'Dole-hoose' in Amsterdam, which was a seventeenth-century Madame Tussaud -type attraction displaying wax figures of famous individuals (mostly from the nobility). One of the exhibits is the Maid of Meure, Eva Vliegen, who "is reported to have lived fifteen years without meat." But the museum wax work, far from paying homage to Vliegen's fasting body, is satirizing it. Vliegen is wiping crumbs from her mouth: her 'prodigious survival' is exposed as a calculated fraud.[1]

Vliegen, who lived in Westphalia, near the Dutch border, began to fast in 1597, when she was aged twenty-two. Her case attracted a lot of attention, both from those who thought God was sustaining her, and those who believed she was a witch. Various luminaries visited, including eminent physicians and nobles. The local minister, Coenrad Velthuizen, was initially sceptical and, as a 'test,' persuaded Vliegen to stay at his house for thirteen days. She consistently refused all food and drink, leading him to regard her fast as authentic. In 1614, she was reported to have died, following a vision in which she saw an angel, but was in fact still alive and fasting in 1625. Eventually, Vliegen's fraud was exposed. She had been concealing food and excreting normally for many years. Initially, she was sentenced to public flagellations, but the sentence was commuted due to her by that time advanced age. Vliegen received a royal pardon and was given five pennies a day by Prince Maurice.[2]

In the community of Meurs and beyond, Vliegen's fasting body constitutes a text in the fullest sense: it is a multimedia event, a spectacle and a public debate, drawing participants from all levels of the social structure. The community's reaction when it discovers that Vliegen has been deceiving it testifies to the symbolic power of her body. The punitive element of the community response is more eloquent in terms of a threat rather than as an punishment actually inflicted. Vliegen is treated sympathetically and mercifully, but there is no question of the authorities sanctioning deliberate deception. Countering the media circus Vliegen had engineered requires a more permanent and concrete strategy than the local and relatively benign measures which follow her exposure. As a monument, the wax-work figure constitutes a symbolic intervention at the level of spectacle. Vliegen's (preserved) body, no longer a valid case of *inedia prodigiosa* (prodigious fasting), elicits irreverent laughter where once she was the object of fascination and amazement. There is little need to inflict privation upon Vliegen's physical body when her symbolic body has been stripped of its subversive excess.

How should we read Vliegen? Is hers an isolated case, or does it have wider cultural significance? Why does a woman's claim to survive without eating provoke so much speculation? Before we can attempt to answer any of these questions, we need to consider the context of the 'fasting girls' phenomenon (the standard nomenclature for cases such as Vliegen's) and, more importantly, its historiography.

Food refusal occurs cross-culturally and transhistorically, but the contexts in which it occurs and the kind of interpretations put upon it differ. It is necessary to interrogate the meanings, functions and motivations of food abstinence for both the individual who fasts and the community who observes and validates the fasting.

Critics have argued that the fasting girl constitutes a distinct category, specific to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since the majority of case occurred in Continental Europe, this suggests a connection between female inedia and Roman Catholicism, but there were also numerous cases of fasting women in seventeenth-century England. I will be examining a number of these in due course. English accounts of the continental cases indicate the extent to which protestant writers were fascinated by inedia. This might seem surprising, until one discovers that they were not averse to claiming analogous cases of protestant women who survived long periods of abstinence by the grace of God. Writers like George Hakewill, who insisted that "the greatest and most notable part of the examples alleged have been of the Protestant religion," patently did not want their readers to assume that miraculous inedia was the exclusive prerogative of the Roman Catholic church.[3]

The attempt by protestants like Hakewill to annex inedia is not simply the result of fascination or curiosity, however. It suggests the considerable investment many commentators had in explicating cases of inedia, in terms of ideological, religious or professional bias. The large number of printed texts which record, interpret and circulate instances of female inedia both reflect and are products of the cultural effects of inedia: the local and national interest, processes of verification, intellectual and public debates, and the intense scrutiny to which the woman in question was subjected. Accounts of the Continental fasting girls, such as Catharina Binder, Jeanne Balam and Margaretha Weiss, testify to the fact that inedia was always investigated by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Doctors, ministers and venerable personages would become involved in the interrogation and surveillance of the girl. This often amounted

to explicit attempts to 'trick' her into eating by exposing her to particularly fragrant or delicious food.[4]

Historicizing the Fasting Body: Inedia and Cultural Transformations

I want to begin by considering sixteenth- and seventeenth-century inedia as it is represented by historians of early modern religion and academics specializing in the theory and treatment of eating disorders. Numerous works have been published on the history of inedia. The primary intention of these texts is to explicate the 'enigma' of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. That is not to say that there is no discussion of pre-nineteenth century self-starvation (the point at which anorexia nervosa emerged as a clinical category), but that non-anorexic inedia is imagined specifically in relation to eating disorders. Typical of this genre is Joan Jacobs Brumberg's *Fasting Girls. The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (1988), which imagines a historical continuum the culmination of which is anorexia nervosa, the point at which self-starvation has become fully secularized. Thus, Brumberg interprets the history of inedia as one of increasing secularization, in which the female abstinent is transformed from 'saint' into 'patient.'

Brumberg asserts: "By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fasting was on the decline as the result of the breakup of medieval culture, the Protestant Reformation, and the scrupulous efforts of religious reformers to disavow traditional practices such as the worship of saints." In the post-Reformation world, prolonged food refusal was no longer regarded as an extreme, though acceptable, element of female piety, but "was increasingly cast as demoniacal,

heretical, and even insane."[5] Brumberg's claim that reformed protestantism successfully eradicated 'superstition' in any form is debatable. In England, as we saw in the previous chapter, seventeenth-century protestantism lacked the sort of coherent and consistent authority necessary to implement and enforce such a programme.

Brumberg's contention that female inedia becomes regarded as excessive and consequently mad appears to be merely a product of her tautological belief in the secularization of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century culture. Similarly, she remarks that during the seventeenth century, "prolonged abstinence more and more was linked to organic causes and regarded as illness. In this way appetite became a general symptom of disease rather than a sign of preternatural intervention."[6] What is most problematic about the secularization theory is the way it misrepresents the interpretative apparatus available to a culture which is confronted with unusual or prodigious events. Brumberg insists on one singular meaning, when in fact a much more ambiguous plurality actually operates. As Sonja van't Hof has noted, the involvement of physicians in early modern cases of female inedia does not mean that it was understood as a medical syndrome. Nor did secularization abolish religious belief among physicians themselves.[7] In retrospect, this may seem like an obvious point, but if the physician is understood as a professional secularist, the possibility of him having religious beliefs (perhaps even traditionalist ones) is denied. It is true that some physicians developed medical theories of self-starvation, but these were improvised, and the important point to note is that their validating charter--science--was not innately superior to or dominant over the religious beliefs which legitimized the texts of Catholic or

protestant writers.

Another text which attempts to write the history of inedia from the perspective of the psychologist is Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth's *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls. The History of Self-Starvation* (1994). Both authors have a background in psychology: Vandereycken, the blurb tells us, is an international authority on eating disorders. They argue that religiously-motivated inedia was declining during the seventeenth century, due to the recent change in attitude of the Roman Catholic church, which no longer encouraged excessively pious behaviour. Protestantism was in any case opposed to practices which it associated with Catholicism. At the same time, Vandereycken and van Deth identify the trend of secularization, where physicians were arguing that inedia was a sign of morbidity rather than of divine immanence. But unlike Brumberg, they stress that the early modern period was transitional. As they point out, the view that inedia was a clinical issue faced considerable resistance, even among medical ranks. Furthermore:

> The transformation of fasting saints and demoniacs committed to the clergy into patients in need of medical care came about only gradually. The process started in the sixteenth century and was completed in the nineteenth century.[8]

During the seventeenth century, inedia continued to be associated with Christianity. But this did not produce a univocal interpretation. On the contrary, a fasting girl was just as likely to be regarded as the devil's work as a holy miracle. At the same time, the involvement of physicians in the screening process which was always deployed in cases of inedia led to the improvisation and

circulation of medical theories. Vandereyecken and van Deth's approach identifies the way in which the emergence of a fasting girl constituted a prodigious event which could not initially be explained. It necessitated the construction of investigative and verifying procedures, which had to be conducted and observed by venerable or professional members within the community and outside it. The cultural response to the 'problem' of inedia gave rise to sometimes oppositional and competing discourses.

However, as we have seen, the polarization of the Roman Catholic and protestant faiths fails to account for both the *interest* in the Continental cases which protestant writers were responsible for publicizing in England, and the actual *incidence* of women fasters in England, whose survival was in some quarters attributed to the providence of God. Evidently, such a polarization, while it may explain the widespread phenomenon of inedia in Catholic Europe, is inadequate if we want to understand the occurrence and interpretation of inedia in protestant England. Vandereycken and van Deth are surely right to emphasize that the secularization of bodily practices like fasting and possession was a gradual, rather than revolutionary, cultural shift, but does this 'transitional theory' necessarily explain the relationship between interdenominational attitudes and religious behaviour? Did the Catholic and protestant churches disagree so radically about the perimeters of personal piety? Why did religiously-motivated inedia persist if both churches openly discouraged it?

The Politic Body: Collective Fasting and the English Protestant State, 1550-1660

Elizabeth K. Hudson's study of Catholic and protestant devotional manuals written during 1580-1620 has shown how the translation of popular Catholic devotional texts into English, such as Luis de Granade's *A Memoriall of a Christian Life* (1586), spearheaded the campaign for a Catholic restoration in England in the 1580s. The Yorkshire minister Edmund Bunny, one of Bishop Edmund Grindall's protégés, highjacked one of these devotional texts in an attempt to avert such a reformation. He produced an unauthorized translation of Father Robert Parson's *First Book of the Christian Exercise* (1582), itself inspired by a Catholic text by Gaspar Loarte. Hudson remarks that Bunny's justification for adapting Parson's text was that, by modifying a Catholic work into a format more palatable to protestants, he "might moderate the bitterness between the two groups, demonstrate their common beliefs, and win some to the national church."[9] For Bunny, staring the possibility of a Catholic reformation in the face, his pragmatic alternative--to attract as many Catholics to the protestant church as he could--offered a way of preventing such a catastrophe.

Hudson suggests that the threat of Catholicism galvanized English protestants to define its practice of piety in more systematic terms and to educate the godly about this by printing popular devotional texts. This became particularly important for non-conformists who, after the 1590s, found their faith increasingly under threat, as the state forced them out of public assemblies and into the household. Hudson suggests that writers and printers were responding to increased public demand for this sort of text.[10] Devotional manuals were, as the name suggests, practical resources designed to help the godly reader strengthen their faith. The Calvinist doctrine of justification by faith meant that in apprehending what might be

called kinetic faith or faith-in-action, non-conformists were assured of their election as the godly people of the Lord.

But the relationship between Catholicism and English protestantism is more complicated than the former taunting the latter into a more systematic exposition of personal piety in devotional manuals. Hudson comments that there are significant similarities between Catholic and protestant practices of piety: "For each, meditation, fasting, prayer, watchfulness (i.e., self-examination) were the recommended devices for vivifying faith."[11] In an essay on public fasting during the English Revolution, Christopher Durston considers this question of similarity regarding collective fasting.

During the course of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, protestants rejected many central elements of Catholic doctrine and liturgy. Fasting, however, was retained, but in a modified form. How did protestant fasting differ from Catholic practice? For protestants, fasting was a goal-orientated activity, practised infrequently and under specific circumstances. Unlike Catholics, who avoided certain proscribed food types, such as meat, protestants reduced the amount of food they consumed. Durston comments that protestants regarded Catholic fasting as "routine."[12] It was an emptied-out ritual, repetitive and meaningless, devoid of any spiritual power.

During the late 1550s, the Elizabethan church instituted a number of fasting days, created as a civic and nationalist response to natural disasters (like plague or crop failure) or to celebrate political success (such as Sir Francis Drake's successful attack on the Spanish fleet in 1587). Radical protestants (or 'Puritans') embraced fasting with rather too much enthusiasm for Elizabeth's

liking, and the state tried to stamp out unauthorized collective fasts, punished anyone caught attending one of these mass fasts. But not everyone was so enthusiastic.

In *The Holy Exercise of Fasting* (1604), Nicholas Bownde attempted to challenge what he saw as public reluctance and ignorance about the weekly Wednesday fast days, which were introduced during a serious plague epidemic. "The time of affliction," he wrote, "is the most fit and conuenient time for fasting."[13] He warned that feasting and indulgence would worsen the plague, and might even cause worse privations.[14] Strategic use of medical metaphors constitutes Bownde's argument. He represents "the gouernors of the Church" as "spirituall Physicians of our soules," who prescribe a "*diet*" of abstinence to induce the sense of humility and repentance which are pre-requisites for salvation.[15] A patient who refuses the treatment of his or her physician could be putting themselves at grave risk; which is what the godly would be doing if they chose not to co-operate with their ministers' instructions. Bownde's recommendations concerning the regularity and duration of fasts stress that current circumstances need to be taken into account. He defines the function of fasting to English protestantism: both *reactive* and *pro-active*: a fast is an act of individual or collective piety which is a response to some form of privation or suffering, and also an attempt to mitigate the effects of the affliction. A short fast should last a single day; longer fasts could extend over several days. The godly could fast either privately or publically. Bownde, who was an academically-trained minister, did not stipulate that the godly should fast only on officially-designated days. But the state, to which the zeal for fasting among radicals was causing increased anxiety, decided to outlaw unofficial fast days. In 1604, Archbishop

Bancroft issued an edict forbidding any unauthorized collective fasts.[16] By the early seventeenth century, the number of national fast days had been streamlined: only a few were held during national emergencies.

During the 1620s collective fasting ceased to be sanctioned in any form by the state. This was the result of Arminianism, a group of highly conservative bishops who felt their authority was being eroded led by William Laud, whose name came to be synonomous with Arminianism and who can personally be credited with the suppression of non-conformity. Charles I's government, heavily leaned on by the Arminians, began its sustained campaign against non-conformists and their putatively subversive practices. Laud was personally horrified by what he saw as the slippery slope of increasing individuation regarding religious belief and practice. He made no secret of his opposition to protestant non-conformity, which suffered under his repressive tactics. Encouraged by Laud, Charles I was much more heavy-handed than Elizabeth had been, and the punitive sanctions levelled at anyone who disobeyed the anti-fasting rule made the organisation of collective fasts a highly risky undertaking. But when severe attacks of plague hit in 1636 and 1637, Charles reneged and ordered two national fast days, although he made it clear that the state had no intention of slackening its grip on the public's practices of piety, issuing detailed instructions as to how these fast days should be organised.[17] Although non-conformist protestants defied the state and continued to hold unofficial fasts, the state regarded such activity as heretical: a direct challenge to the authority of Charles and Laud.

After Charles I's execution in early 1649, the regular monthly fast days which had been held were abandoned, although the state continued

to support less regular fast days. Durston notes that more than 130 days were made official fast or thanksgiving days between 1640 and 1660. As Nicholas Bownde explains to his readers, the function of these occasions was to promote a sense of "humiliation" among the people, since a sense of unworthiness and self-abasement were central features of Calvinist theology.[18]

After the reformation in 1660, the populace was increasingly less amenable to the institutionalized rituals designed to instil a sense of spiritual abjection. They judged the succession of politicians and rulers in recent times as hypocrites who certainly did not practice what they preached. In 1604, Nicholas Bownde could say: "this order of fasting is not a thing deuised by man: but appointed of God," but by the restoration, people were more sceptical.[19] Samuel Crooke compiled a catalogue of hypocrites entitled *TA DIAPHERONTA, or Divine Characters* (1658). He describes one kind as afflicted by "a spiritual *Bulimy*," who appear to consume sermons only to vomit them up again. Unlike the godly individual, who translates the truth of the sermon into every aspect of his or her life, the bulimic hypocrite squanders the spiritual 'food' dispensed by ministers for the purpose of sustaining the elect.[20] To what extent civil war politics influenced Crooke must remain speculative, but his use of this metaphor of conspicuous consumption is clearly resonant in terms of the use of official fast days by politicians and monarchs as a form of ideological control.

Historical investigation into the formation of early modern piety demonstrates that the polarization of Catholic and protestant spiritual practice is too simplistic. Consequently, we can contest both Joan Brumberg's assertion that secular interpretations of fasting were superseding religious ones, and Walter Vandereycken and

Ron van Deth's argument that protestantism was unilaterally opposed to anything remotely Catholic. The error is in framing the seventeenth century with the critical equivalent of time-lapse photography, trying to accelerate the prevailing multiplicity of cultural discourses into inevitable 'progress' towards a secular ideal. Even if the transitional nature of a historical period is admitted, the critic can still be guilty of overstating the secular case.

Despite the fact that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the attitudes of successive regimes towards collective fasting changed, what remains consistent is that fasting is politicized and regulated. When the radicals appropriated the fast day, raising money for the benefit of the persecuted brethren across the English Channel, the state construed their innovation as a blatant act of subversion, and tried to implement tighter controls over collective worship. At least some of the time, purging the body for the benefit of the soul was a sanctioned and even encouraged practice. But to understand the cultural milieu of Eva Vliegen's English counterparts (for it is these that this chapter will concentrate on), we need to think about the relationship between Protestantism, gender and fasting. Can we speak of a gender distinction between male and female fasting?

Cut on the Bias: Fashioning The Ascetic Body and the Gluttonous Body

As we have seen, while protestants retained fasting as a last vestige of anachronistic Catholic piety, they differentiated their practice of fasting from the irreligious method used by Papists in

terms of regularity, duration and the nature of the abstention. A fast had to have a specific purpose. Whereas for Catholics, fasting constituted the exclusion or inclusion of certain food types, protestants tried to reduce the quantity of food they consumed. During the seventeenth century, non-conformists (the one group among the godly for whom encouragement to fast was unnecessary) chose to augment the discipline of fasting into their ordinary eating practice. In Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*, the steward Malvolio is called "a kind of Puritan" because he issues a moratorium on informal nocturnal gatherings in which alcohol, dancing and lewd behaviour feature highly. Sir Toby Belch, the principal hell-raiser, demands: "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (II.iii.125;103-4). For the play's characters whose pleasure is spoilt, Malvolio is the eponymous 'Puritan,' simultaneously a figure of fun and a figure of no fun, since he is disdainful of the ways which 'the little people' choose to amuse themselves. We should also note that the word 'Puritan' is heavily value-laden. Its common use by historians might suggest a neutral term describing an individual's religious affiliation, but it was used and understood as an insult.

As a cultural referent, *Twelfth Night* suggests that those individuals who were labelled as Puritans were perceived as severe, humourless and rigorously ascetic. This association persists to the present day. But to the non-conformists (or the godly, as they preferred to call themselves), pious behaviour was not about total abstention, but rather moderation. One of the most influential devotional manuals for non-conformists was Richard Baxter's weighty tome, *A Christian Directory* (1673). This gives detailed information on the theory and practice of fasting.

The antithesis of moderate consumption is gluttony, which the godly must continually strive against. Gluttony is a heinous sin against self and community. As a principal cause of premature death, it verges on self-murder: "we may well say that Gluttony enricheth Landlords, filleth the Churchyards, and hasteneth multitudes untimely to their ends."[21] Baxter points out that as "the immediate symptome of a *carnal mind*," gluttony has a detrimental effect on the practice of piety, and is therefore an enemy to religious belief. His argument that gluttony constitutes "a most *unthankful sin*" is analogous to Samuel Crooke's notion of the hypocrite-as-bulimic. The glutton, he insists: "takes Gods mercies and spews them as it were in his face; and carryeth his provisions over to his enemy, even to the strengthening of fleshly lusts: and turneth them all against himself?" The profligate, unsatisfied with "a bit" of God's "liberality and blessing," shames God with his or her limitless and wasteful greed.[22] Baxter represents God as the prudent patriarch, who manages his 'household' economically and has a horror of luxury and prodigality. Baxter argues that fasting and humility are much more appropriate to mankind stained by original sin than succumbing to extravagance. Baxter identifies a correlation between fasting and the discipline of intellectual activity, suggesting that restraint can be learnt in order to subdue the desires of the 'carnal' body. Consequently, one of the causes of gluttony is:

> unacquaintedness with those *Rational* and *Spiritual Exercises* in which the delightful fruits of *Abstinence* do most appear. A man that is but a painful serious Student, in any noble study whatsoever, doth find a great deal of serenity and aptitude come by *Temperance*, and a great deal of cloudy mistiness on his mind,

and dulness on his invention, come by *fulness* and excess: And a man that is used to holy contemplations, meditation, reading, prayer, self-examination or any spiritual converse above, or with his heart, doth easily find a very great difference; how *abstinence* helpeth, and Luxury and fulness hinder him. Now these *Epicures* have no acquaintance with any such Holy or *Manly* works; nor any mind of them, and are therefore unacquainted with the sweetness and benefit of *abstinence*.[23]

Baxter's identification of the '*Rational*' and 'Holy' with the '*Manly*' demonstrates that his promotion of fasting is being targetted specifically at the man of letters. The main purpose of depriving the body's appetites is to vivify the soul, but abstinence confers benefits onto the mind as well. Baxter confidently predicts significant improvements in intellectual clarity and productivity. In this passage, Baxter contrasts the 'excessive' gluttonous body with the ascetic's admirably spare and lean body, controlled by his rational and reasonable mind. Restraint, Baxter argues, liberates and empowers the intellectual faculties.

In Baxter's scheme, abstinence, as a form of asceticism, is being closely associated with masculinity. As a household devotional text, *The Christian Directory* is not intended for a solely male audience, but it is in the synchronous figure of the intellectual and the godly male that Baxter is able to envisage the ultimate personification of moderate and utilitarian ascetic piety. The text follows the non-conformist practice of encouraging the godly to a daily contemplation and implementation of ascetic behaviour, providing an exhaustive list of "Direction or Helps" to support this. After this, Baxter stresses that it is not his intention for readers to embrace

asceticism in an immoderate or obsessive manner:

> Yet after all this, I shall remember you that you run not into the contrary extream: Place not more Religion in external abstinence and fastings than you ought: Know your own condition, and how far either *fasting* or *eating* is really a *help* or a hindrance to you in those greater things which are their ends, and so far use them. A decaying body must be carefully supported: An unruly body must be carefully subdued: The same medicines serve not for contrary tempers and diseases: To think, that abstaining from *flesh*, and glutting your selves with fish, and other meats is acceptable to God; or that meer abstaining so many hours in a Week, and serving your appetite on the rest, is meritorious, or that abstinence from meat will prove you holy, without an absence from sin, all this is self-deluding error. Nor must you raise a great many of perplexing scruples about all that you eat or drink, to no Edification, but meerly to your vexation: But in cheerful Temperance your Health, and subdue Concupiscence.[24]

Baxter is aware of the possibility that the godly might unintentionally emulate papist practices by embarking on a restricter-type fast, become so enthusiastic about ascetic commitment that they neglect to guard against sin, or that they punish their bodies beyond what is beneficial and healthful. The essence of Baxter's argument is the insistence on fasting as a goal-orientated activity. This is suggestive in relation to the phenomenon of prolonged fasting by early modern women. We might speculate that one of the reasons for the intense public interest

generated by a case of female inedia is that the fast was seen as having no discernible point: it lacked an appropriate object. A woman who refuses food indefinitely, claiming she does not need to eat, deviates from the utilitarian principles described by Baxter in his valorization of male asceticism. Set against Baxter's scheme, long-term female inedia is excessive, irrational and almost certainly harmful. In theory, it should be impossible. The fact that fraud is invariably assumed *a priori* is hardly surprising: fasting women pose an enormous challenge to public credulity. The urge to reach a rational explanation in cases like Martha Taylor's (the celebrated 'Derbyshire Damosell') was irresistible.

Do non-devotional texts substantiate the existence of a gender bias in asceticism? A commonplace book, probably written in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, contains, among other miscellaneous topics, a section on 'Great Fasters.' The text lists cases of inedia dating from the late sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, including Eva Vliegen, Katherine Binder and Joan Balam. The majority of the fasters are women. This is a derivative account, drawn from numerous contemporary sources on early modern inedia (George Hakewill's remarks on Vliegen are cited.)

The anonymous author does not address the issue of inedia from any specific scientific or theological position. The cases he or she describes are all Continental with one exception, which concerns a Scottish Catholic. Perhaps because it exists in manuscript form and not as a printed book, intended for private rather than public circulation, the text does not try to induce the reader to accept a specific interpretation of inedia. Reference is made to George Hakewill's protestant appropriation of the fasting girl phenomenon, but (unlike Hakewill) the author does not argue that fasting is a

vindication of Roman Catholicism. Instead, the non-specialist, accessible style of the text, the exploitation of cases for their curiosity value, the representation of the fasting female body as anomoly, all suggest the absorption of inedia into a cultural idiom of folk beliefs and practices. The examinations of physicians are documented alongside assertions that a fasting girl (in this case, Katherine Binder) "fed only upon the Air."[25] Each account contains speculative information about each fasting girl. A thirteen-year-old girl is brought to Cologne by her parents, who themselves allege that she has not eaten or drunk anything for the past three years. When induced to eat a small amount of sugar, she becomes immediately distressed. Despite this and the fact that she has a "malencholy Countenance," this girl: "Walked up and down, played with other Girls danced and did all other things, that are done by Girls of her Age."[26] At times, the narrative verges on romance. A ten-year-old girl, who began to refuse food in 1539, drew the attention of the Emperor Maximillian, who arranged for her to be watched closely for twelve days. When he realized "there could be no jugling in the business, he gaue her leaue to return to her Friends not without great Admiration and princely gifts."[27]

The text leaves the cultural mythology of inedia intact: even Eva Vliegen is presented as a *bona fide* case of inedia, vindicated by the magistrates and ministers of the town of Meurs. The cases are presented to the reader as enigmatic, but no attempt is made to explicate them. The author appears more interested in documenting the anthropology of inedia, demonstrating how each case generates its own folklore, than in reading inedia as a manifestation of the miraculous.

The representation of prodigious inedia as a specifically *gendered*

enigma is made explicit by the sole exception to the female majority in the commonplace book's catalogue, the case of a male hunger striker. In 1639, John Scot, a Catholic, lost a legal case and sought sanctuary in a church "where out of discontent" he abstained from all food and drink. He maintained this fast for about thirty to forty days, by which time Charles I heard about it, and had him imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle for a month.[28] He continued to fast for thirty-two days, after which time he was released. He travelled to Rome, where he secured an audience with Pope Clement VII, who gave him a papal seal authenticating his fast. He took this to Venice before returning to England, where he said disparaging things about Henry VIII, for which he was thrown into prison again. He continued to fast for another fifty days.[29]

For Richard Baxter, John Scot's practice of fasting is defined by his Catholicism, making him an object lesson for protestants on how not to do it, but in one important respect John conforms to Baxter's paradigm of the masculinist 'good fast.' The failure of his legal action precipitates a rupture in John Scot's ontological reality, causing him to experience himself as an abject in relation to the external world. Rather than internalizing that abjection, he contests it, by deploying his body as a political and religious strategy. John Scot's fast is therefore a rational response to unconventional circumstances. In fact, the exceptionality of the situation John Scot finds himself in is in itself justification for the immoderation of his fast. Baxter deplored the routine use of fasting, praising the productive use of fasts as a reaction to situations which threatened individuals or communities. John Scot's abstention fits this criteria. But his fast is radically unlike all of the other cases involving women.

The text represents John Scot's fast as politically-motivated, the reasonable and rational act of a moral agent, while portraying inedia in women as mysterious, unmotivated and passive. John Scot engineers the cultural response to his hunger strike. His wasted but symbolically powerful body subverts the state's attempts to silence him through incarceration. But this notion of the body as an empowering device is absent in the text's representation of the adolescent fasting girl. More wide-eyed *ingénue* than autonomous self, she has virtually no influence at any stage in the process by which she becomes visible and an object of compulsory scrutiny. We are told of the 1595 Cologne case how the girl plays 'normally,' apparently oblivious of her transformation into a media commodity. Parents or physicians instigate local interest in the girl, who is then placed under the guardianship of a venerable personage, in whose house she remains for several days or weeks while her alleged ability to survive without food is verified. Writing on the history of anorexia nervosa, Richard A. Gordon has noted how the reading of food refusal as political protest is contingent upon gender:

> although historically the hunger striker is invariably from the ranks of the oppressed, it is interesting that throughout history the vast majority of political hunger strikers have been male (the one example is that of the suffragettes). Women's fasting, on the other hand, has only been permissible in religious contexts. Apparently, even when they are from the downtrodden, it is more permissible for males to engage in direct aggression--even when it takes a passive form. For women, the protest must remain veiled in a mystical or symptomatic language. Anorexia nervosa, of course, falls into

this category.[30]

This is not to suggest that all or indeed any of the Continental cases recorded in the commonplace book are hunger strikers instead of examples of *inedia prodigiosa*, but to point out that the gendering of food refusal has a reductive effect on the potential meanings and functions of women's inedia. The 'fasting girl,' a trope of femininity-as-anomoly, passes into cultural discourse as a provisionally unpatented form of intellectual property. Observers and auditors compete for this 'ownership' of a case of inedia by attempting to assimilate the enigma of the woman's survival into certain philosophical, religious or scientific paradigms. But scant attention is paid to the meanings inedia might have for the woman who, whether she elects to or not, experiences it. The gender difference contained in the term 'fasting girl' implies a homogeneity of women's bodily practices which intervenes in the cultural hermeneutics of inedia, making an apolitical reading almost inevitable.

As both a twentieth-century historical category and an early modern normative paradigm of female inedia, the 'fasting girl' fails to reflect the ways in which seventeenth-century women mobilize their bodies as instruments of self-assertion, political advocacy or religious belief. In 1685, the Royalist pamphleteer Elinor James published a broadside addressed to James II, in which she claims she has fasted regularly to prove her allegiance to him. She seeks approval for a plan she has devised to end the "Controversie" between protestantism and Roman Catholicism, which she is convinced will prove that the Church of England is the "True Church:"

my Proposal is this, *That I would be shut into a Room with any*

Roman Catholick *that is sincere, and that there should be but one Key to the Lock, and your Majesty to keep the Key, and I will be search'd , that I carry not any thing with me, and go in Fasting, and remain so either Seven Days and Nights, or Nine Days and Nights, or as many as your Majesty shall think fit, and I look that whoever undertakes it with me, should do the same sincerely...but if it be a Man, I beseech your Majesty to let some Body be with me Day and Night, to prevent Scandal.*

As an example of pious fasting, James's audacious and innovative strategy is apparently a concession to the notion that women's religious experience is literally embodied, but is combined with a subjectivity and intentionality which have no legitimate place within the paradigm of passive and silent female piety. James negotiates patriarchal authority by emphasizing her allegiance to James II, and ostensibly operates within the perimeters of appropriate female piety, representing herself as a 'weak' woman: "*all must know, that Nature is weak in me by my often Fasting...and therefore what I do must be by a strong Faith, and the Assistance of the Almighty.*"[31] She has even considered the possibility of a male Catholic accepting her challenge, and asks James II to make provision for an impartial observer to ensure the contest is not marred by scandal.

In a sense, it is irrelevant whether or not the king gives his permission for this religious contest to go ahead. James has *already* publically exposed her fasting body by publishing the broadside. As an author and petitioner of the king, Elinor James contests the assumption that women's ascetic practices can exist only within domesticated and privatized contexts. It might be argued that

James's case differs from *inedia prodigiosa*, but a distinction between elective and passive fasting is difficult to sustain, precisely because the body of the fasting woman tends to be perceived as an inarticulate body, or more precisely, an untranslated body: necessitating the production of interpretative discourse from observers and investigators. This assumption that the body is unable to speak for itself negates the agency of the fasting woman, which is excluded and denigrated by the cumulative effects of the appropriation of her inedia. Recovering the strategic use of fasting by early modern women is problematized by the fact that the texts documenting inedia are invariably mediated texts which infer meaning onto bodily practices.

The corollary to the promotion of moderate, functional fasting by protestant theologians like Richard Baxter is an anxiety about fasting which is involuntary or forcibly imposed, as well as putatively 'excessive.' This is a contributing factor in the gendering of ascetic practices. John Reynolds wrote a scientific treatise on Martha Taylor's inedia in 1669. He concludes by anticipating those irreverent readers who might ask why, having proved that survival is possible on minimal rations, Reynolds does not opt for a life of "frugality" (as he puts it) himself. He frankly admits that:

> Though with this jejune Table one may possibly live, yet it follows not that I can, for according to the old Saw, *That which is one mans meat is another mans poyson.*[32]

The purpose of Reynolds's text is to divest inedia of its miraculous and superstitious associations. Heavily indebted to

Thomas Willis's *Of Fermentation of the Inorganical Motion of Natural Bodies* (1659), Reynolds identifies the primary aetiology in cases of inedia as the physiology of adolescent females, which can compensate for a "defect" in food intake. If we regard Reynolds's final remark as a coda to the treatise, its function appears to be to define his role as an objective and rational natural philosopher. The "jejune Table" is jocularly treated as if it were 'poisonous,' which, symbolically, it is: if inedia is a symptom of femininity, an attempt by Reynolds to emulate Martha Taylor would constitute a transgression of his own masculinity.

But more importantly, the pursuit of empirical knowledge and the autonomy of the scientist are legitimized by the social construction of gender. Reynolds's text is constructed upon a notion of the female body as simultaneously a mysterious interior space which can be penetrated by the natural philosopher, and a blank page onto which the author can inscribe his text. In this, he adheres to Baconian science, in which nature is represented as feminine: "Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object."[33] Reynolds casts himself as the scientific auditor, a role that would be compromised should he decide to participate and, to borrow the anthropological expression, go native. The equilibrium between the scientist and the object of his investigations must be preserved in order to validate the knowledge he produces. Reynolds implies that the cause of inedia is not a physiological process unique to young girls, but femininity itself.

Two instances from seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies written by men corroborate the notion that the involuntary compulsion to fast is a source of revulsion, horror and despair.

George Trosse, born in 1631, became a non-conformist divine in 1662 when all Puritans were expelled from the Church of England. In his later years, he practiced as a dissenting minister in his home town of Exeter. In his *Life* (1714), Trosse describes his dissolute youth, in the midst of which he suffered an acute spiritual crisis which led to several periods of incarceration in an asylum at Glastonbury.

Lying in bed one day in a drunken stupor, Trosse hears a voice he thinks is God. The voice tells Trosse that he must not eat or drink. Trosse began to feel disgusted by the smell of food, and complies: "I refus'd all *Food* whatever which might be offer'd me. I would not endure the *Smell* of it. If it was brought nigh me, I would turn aside with the greatest Indignation and Aversion, as if it had been some abominable Thing." With retrospective insight, Trosse recognizes that the voice belonged to the Devil, attempting to persuade Trosse to kill himself. This was a "Delusion, as tho' the *Starving* of my *Body* was the Way to *save* my *Soul*."[34]

In *Ohel or Beth-shemeth. A Tabernacle for the Sun* (1653), John Rogers, an Independent minister, describes how fraternizing with "*godly Puritans*" lost him his friends, job and accommodation.[35] He was left homeless during the winter and forced to beg for alms from the cottages of poor people as he travelled across country to Cambridge, where he had formerly been a Servitor at King's College. Here he tried to secure a position as a "sizer or poor Scholar," but all of his old acquaintances had left, and he was unsuccessful. However, he manages to find shelter in a room at Cambridge. Roger's account is at its bleakest when he describes the extremes of hunger and destitution which he endured:

> I had no money, and I wanted bread...I was forced for life to try

all things, and eat leather, and drink water, and eat old quils and pens (where I could pick them up out of the dust or dunghils) roasted in a few coals (which were left in the Chamber where I was) and I assayed sometimes to eat *grasse*, and did it: yea I grew to that height of *penury* and *famine*, that I sometimes tryed to eat my own *fingers*, biting them until I could endure it no longer; then tearing my *hair*, and crying...I met with *temptations* in this *wildernesse* to turn *stones into bread*, and the *Devill* did often tempt me to study *Necromancy & Nigromancy*, and to make use of *Magick*, and to make a *league* with him, and that then I should never want.[36]

Rogers' s physical condition deteriorated. His body became emaciated and weak, his face grew pallid ("*wearing deaths colours*," as he puts it) and he began to despair. He was constantly assailed by temptation, which he fought strenuously by prayer and reading, but there was no respite. On one occasion, maddened by hunger, Rogers made to rip off his arm with his teeth, but desisted, convinced that death was now inevitable. For a while he survived on scraps of food given by Cambridge scholars who took pity on him, but Rogers was ashamed of having to beg, and eventually no-one offered him help.[37]

Rogers began to weaken under Satan's torments. In desperation, he decides to kill himself. Drawing out his knife, Rogers prepares to surrender his soul to God, but he is interrupted by a scholar coming into the room. Guiltily, Rogers concealed his knife in the chimney. The scholar tells him he has been offered a position to teach children at Lord Brudenell's house in Huntingdon. Rogers realizes God has saved him from the misery of poverty, and after the scholar had gone,

he "did exceedingly reprove and check [him]self, for suffering this *temptation* to grow so...for want of faith."[38]

Twice Rogers attempts self-cannabalism: these are pivotal episodes of self-disgust, horror, despair and revulsion. Like Trosse, Rogers shows how the Devil exploits and encourages abstention as an instrument of delusion or torment. The fast as privation or compulsion differs radically from the ascetic or passive fast. It is a desperate struggle for physical and spiritual survival. Both Rogers and Trosse portray themselves as abjects, vulnerable to satanic influence. Associated with the spiritual impoverishment both experience intolerable feelings of psychic instability, loss of control and of the social relationships which define the self, such as kinship networks, status, employment and accommodation.

The representation of the apparently benign, passive and quiescent experience of inedia by women contrasts with the terrifying psychomachy which beseiges Trosse and Rogers. Narratives of women's inedia emphasize the absence of hunger. John Reynolds claims that young women's physiologies equip them to survive on meagre amounts of food. Accounts of fasting girls allege their ability to derive sustenance purely from the air they breathe, to find fragrant and delicious foods repugnant, to function normally despite a lack of food. But John Rogers's body has no way of adapting to starvation. For him, hunger becomes an obsession which even the discipline of piety is not powerful enough to restrain. George Trosse realizes that his disgust at the smell of food is a trick by the Devil to induce him to suicide. As Joan Smith notes, powerlessness is a key feature of starvation: "Hunger...does not just happen to people; it's *done* to them. The visible effects of starvation are an emblem of

disempowerment, an admission that its victims have been reduced to an animal-like state in which nothing matters except food."[39]

Both Trosse and Rogers experience starvation as an element of Satanic victimization, a process which erodes their masculinist rationality and which, if successful, would have supplanted their reason with bestiality. As a text which documents despair as a potentially mortal affliction from which the believer recovers, the conversion experience narrative is a work of recuperation, repairing the trauma inflicted upon the author's ontological reality by retrospectively imposing meaning and closure onto the experience of suffering. Thus George Trosse is able to say that when he attempted to starve himself, he must have been seduced by the Devil, since persistent and protracted self-starvation inevitably results in death. God would not encourage such privation among the godly. Writing his autobiography, Trosse implicitly reinforces the protestant, masculinist notion of moderate asceticism. He suggests that the undertaking of 'excessive' practices should immediately lead one to suspect malevolent influence.

Satan's proclivity for excess explains why cases of female inedia were often suspected as having a demonic provenance. Historians have shown how the witchcraft allegation, a strategy of persecution and containment, was often made against women perceived as powerful or threatening in some way. For example, Lyndal Roper's research on early modern village communities in Germany has suggested that those accused of witchcraft were women who worked as midwives or wet-nurses. They were regarded as abusers of vulnerable pregnant women and their infants.[40] But this does not necessarily mean that the women who became defined as witches wielded some form of magical tyranny from which they could materially profit.

Our survey of early modern protestant attitudes towards fasting and asceticism which negotiate the extremes of gluttony and hunger demonstrates that the conceptual apparatus for imagining prolonged female inedia simply did not exist. Fasting women were not necessarily powerful women, but they were transgressive figures, for whom interpretations had to be improvised in order to mitigate the potentially damaging effects of this highly visible form of deviance. Obviously, attempts to contain fasting women could be justified by representing them as powerful and subversive individuals. But what I want to stress is the notion of early modern female inedia as existing beyond boundaries, and the sense in which it threatened to make accepted ideas partially or wholly redundant. Having considered the representation of fasting in early modern writing, I now want to assess one of the central issues for critics and historians working on female inedia: can we usefully compare it with anorexia nervosa?

Mystical Bedlam: Asceticism, Culture and Psychopathology

A reader attempting to review the recent clinical and theoretical literature on eating disorders would not dispute Arthur W. Frank's comment on the ubiquity of the body. "Bodies are in, in academia as well as in popular culture," he wrote in 1990.[41] It is perhaps ironic that the anorectic body should be the focus for an exponential production of texts, suggesting that what the critic brings to the anorectic's 'empty' body is language to fill it. This body is being imagined as a sort of lacuna, which creates a sense of intellectual and cognitive dis-ease. Does the twentieth-century popular and critical fascination with anorexia and bulimia nervosa reiterate

early modern efforts to explicate female inedia?

The term 'anorexia nervosa' was identified by the physicians William Withney Gull and Ernest Charles Lasègue, who worked independently but somehow contrived to publish research into anorexia at the same time, during the 1870s and 80s. The acceptance of the term in medical nosology is regarded as the beginning of anorexia nervosa's official history. This does not preclude the existence of similar bodily practices prior to this period, but instead signals a major development in the interpretation of inedia. Following 1880, such practices became subject to medical regulation, as 'symptoms' of an accredited medical disease. Given that pre-nineteenth-century analogues to anorexia exist, is it legitimate to reclaim these cases as anorexic?

A famous case of 'pre-anorexic anorexia' regularly quoted in the literature is Richard Morton's *Pthisiologia: Or, A Treatise of Consumptions*, originally published in 1694. Morton was a non-conformist minister until he lost his living in 1662 after refusing to comply with the Act of Uniformity. He had no formal medical training, but was granted an 'honorary' medical degree by the King. Morton documents the case history of the eighteen-year-old daughter of a Mr. Duke, who, in 1684, was suffering from amenorrhea (absence of menstruation) and *atrophia nervosa* (nervous consumption). The girl's condition was exacerbated by the freezing weather conditions and by her intensive studying.

She manifested what nineteenth-century alienists would describe as 'la belle indifference': an apparent indifference to her illness and the fact that her own behaviour is an obstacle to therapeutic intervention. Morton remarks of his patient: "from that time loathing all sorts of Medicaments, she wholly neglected the care of

herself, till at last being brought to the last degree of a *Marasmus*, or Consumption, and thereupon subject to frequent Fainting-Fits, she apply'd herself to me for Advice."[42] ('Marasmus' is a wasting of the body). The girl's body is so severely emaciated that even Morton is shocked. He could not remember, he remarked, seeing anyone "that was conversant with the Living so much wasted with the greatest degree of a Consumption." He examines her, but finds her curiously asymptomatic: there is no fever, cough or breathing problems. "Only her Appetite was diminished, and her Digestion uneasy," he writes. Morton prescribed some stomach electuaries and herbs, which benefited the girl for as long as she continued to take them, which unfortunately was not very long. She grew impatient and "beg'd that the whole Affair might be committed again to Nature," and her condition deteriorated. Three months later she died.[43]

Morton noted that the condition of Mr. Duke's daughter was exacerbated by "a multitude of Cares and Passions of her Mind."[44] According to Joseph A. Silverman, Morton uniquely identified a "psychiatric" component in the aetiology of anorexia nervosa.[45] Elsewhere, in a biographical article on Morton, Silverman calls him a "limner" of anorexia nervosa, meaning 'one who displays or represents.'[46] Certainly Morton presents a patient who is less than compliant, but Silverman's insistence that she suffers from a psychiatric illness is debatable, not least because psychiatry is a term specific to twentieth-century culture and transplanting it into the seventeenth century is highly problematic.

More importantly, Morton's perception of his patient's 'excessive' study as deleterious is loudly seconded by Silverman, for whom this is what psychiatrists refer to as the patient's lack of insight into their condition. It is significant that this patient is

defined as a daughter, a cultural role which she consistently rejects. The more she insists on studying and refusing her medicine, the more 'ill' she becomes. This patient is the quintessential bad daughter, disobeying the physician (a surrogate father) and refusing to accept that, as a sick woman, she should 'act' weak and dependent. We might question the legitimacy of reading Mr. Duke's daughter as an example of anorexia nervosa, yet this is exactly what has been done: Morton, Gull and Lasègue constitute the triumvirate of anorexia nervosa theory. Vandereyeken and van Deth note that, as the 'father' figures of anorexia, their view of the condition as "a psychogenic self-starvation" remained dominant until the first quarter of the twentieth century, after which theorists of anorexia began to dispute current assumptions and raise scientific controversies, which ultimately remain unanswered.[47]

The aim of those critics who search for historical analogues to eating disorders is to counter the assumption that anorexia and bulimia nervosa are culture-bound syndromes (that is to say, specific to twentieth-century culture, whose 'obsession' with thinness and physical attractiveness has been implicated by some as a major causal factor in the media-hyped 'epidemic' of eating disorders). William Parry-Jones and Brenda Parry-Jones have identified a number of historical antecedents for eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and pica (the ingestion of inedible substances). They argue that, seen historically, symptoms are subject to considerable variation. When the major diagnostic manuals used by clinicians are revised, there need to be recognition that the features of a condition by which it is categorized are not finite.[48] Elsewhere, Brenda Parry-Jones has suggested that the terminology of eating disorders has remained consistent since the medieval

period.[49]

The problem with both articles is that although one of the findings of their comparative research is a degree of historical difference, there is nonetheless a generalizing assumption that while variations in eating practices may occur, they remain nosologically distinct and essentially consistent across time. While Brenda Parry-Jones argues that anorexia has a long linguistic history, in which its meaning remains consistent, she does not take into account cultural differences in the contexts in which the term has been used. One of the eating disorders whose linguistic history she documents is bulimia nervosa. Previously in this chapter, we looked at Samuel Crooke's metaphorization of "spiritual bulimy." When Crooke spoke of bulimics, he meant individuals who superficially listened to sermons, only to vomit them up unused and undigested. But this is obviously different from the twentieth-century gendered notion of the bulimic: a woman with low self-esteem who conceals her bulimia from friends and family, locked in a viciously destructive binge-purge cycle, in which she consumes thousands of calories of food in the space of an hour only to lock herself in the toilet and vomit it back up. As an eating practice involving the ingestion and voluntary expulsion of aliment, Crooke and myself are speaking about the same thing. But the contexts in which this practice is being imagined are radically different. Where Crooke saw hypocrites and sought to condemn them, we see victims of a compulsive psychiatric disorder (perhaps Diana, Princess of Wales).

The problems associated with comparative studies of eating practices should be apparent: the contexts and functions of a type of behaviour determine its meaning, a process which must be recognized as culturally specific. This appears to confirm the theory that

anorexia nervosa is a culture-bound syndrome. If so, how have critics differentiated between eating disorders and medieval and early modern inedia? Rudolph M. Bell's monograph, *Holy Anorexia* (1985) argues that medieval women mystics manifest what he calls "holy anorexia," an interface between the cultural imperatives of medieval piety and the psychological element of self-starvation. Bell suggests that the adolescent woman mystic challenges the perimeters of medieval religiosity by appropriating inedia as an empowering strategy, a response to her lack of autonomy as a woman within patriarchal culture. In this respect, her experience is parallel to the situation of the anorectic.

Bell asserts: "The modifier is the key; whether anorexia is holy or nervous depends on the culture in which a young woman strives to gain control of her life." The adolescent girl commits to attaining "a highly valued societal goal," be it thinness or self-control in the twentieth century, or pious asceticism in medieval culture. While others never progress far beyond their good intentions, the girl impresses family and friends with her dedication and success. Bell describes her emergence from "a frightened, insecure, psychic world...to become a champion in the race for (bodily/spiritual) perfection."[50] It becomes necessary for the adolescent to set herself new goals in order to continue to receive approbation and admiration. As a consequence, self-starvation becomes compulsive, eventually overriding the girl's conscious control. Bell qualifies the parallel between anorexia and medieval ascetic piety by insisting on the hiatus between medieval and modern culture. The shift from "holy" to "nervous" anorexia recapitulates the secularization thesis discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Some critics have expressed anxiety about equating food refusal in

history with eating disorders. Caroline Walker Bynum regards the practices of medieval women mystics and the self-starvation of the anorectic as radically different. She reacts with some hostility to the notion that the experiences of medieval women might provide some insight into the behaviour of anorectics. "Medieval symbols, behaviors, and doctrines have no direct lessons for the 1980s," she argues in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987). "They were produced by a world that has vanished."[51] In her later book, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Bynum is prepared to concede Bell's point that a degree of similarity exists, while emphasizing the inappropriateness of diagnosing fasting women in the past as anorectics. She comments that the "striking parallels" between medieval mystics and anorectic women suggest that food possess significant symbolic value for women. Nevertheless, Bynum asserts that medieval ascetic women did not simply refuse food as a strategy of self-control or retreat from the world. Their attitude towards food: "was ultimately not rejection of the physical and bodily, but a finding of the truly physical, the truly nourishing, the truly fleshly, in the humanity of Christ, chewed and swallowed in the eucharist...physicality was not so much rooted out or suppressed as embraced and redeemed *at that point* where it intersected with the divine."[52] Bynum is not only anxious about the risk that historical women could be pathologized by being reappraised as anorectics, but also that the anorexic paradigm of the cultural pursuit of thinness and the resultant negative body image among women misrepresents the intentionality of medieval ascetics. Bynum's point is that medieval women who desired mystical union with Christ were not trying to make their bodies thinner, but spiritually 'fuller.'

Margaret Miles challenges Bynum's rejection of a link between the twentieth-century slender body and the medieval woman ascetic. Miles argues that Bynum makes the mistake of reading a woman's claim that her body is too 'big' too literally, explicitly associating it with the superficiality of diet culture. Modern anorectics, like medieval women, might "be describing an unbearable asymmetry between their cultural provisions and support, and their personal yearning...Like medieval women, twentieth-century women live in a culture that neglects to incite, encourage, and provide support for women's intellectual, psychological, and spiritual development."[53] Women who develop eating disorders might do so as a way of resisting a society which is only interested in the body, magnifying its surfaces out of all proportion to women's subjectivity, which is miniaturized out of sight. Miles suggests that for the anorectic woman, the overexposure of the body precipitates her appropriation of asceticism as a subversive strategy. Miles remarks that the ascetic mode may be "the most direct way to vent the psyche."[54]

For Miles, the asceticism of anorexia is analogous to the extreme asceticism of medieval mystics (such as drinking pus from open wounds, self-flagellation and sleep deprivation), because both involve the self-conscious expression of desire for an object which is not culturally sanctioned as pleasurable. The search for alternative pleasures is a strategy for resisting socialization, which generates some of the pleasure. Miles identifies the way in which the ascetic learns to not only regulate her desire but also to project it. By negotiating "the dynamic of temptation and resistance," the ascetic is able to create "a countercultural 'self'".[55] The expressive ascetic self alleviates psychological suffering caused by the impact of socialization upon the individual.

Reading anorexia as a form of asceticism allows the critic to simultaneously recover the ascetic and anorectic modes as strategies available to women as a defence against the totalizing repression of patriarchy. Indeed, some critics have identified a signature of religious asceticism in anorexia nervosa. "The asceticism of anorexia nervosa may appear perverse rather than good, debased rather than noble, foolish rather than heroic," remarks David Rampling, "but even in its most misguided forms it may contain within itself an ineradicable element of the numinous."[56] Rampling's frustration with anorexia nervosa is explained by its descent from the ambivalent position of the body within Christianity. Since the function of extreme ascetic practices is to subjugate carnal desire, it might be assumed that Christians regard the body as a filthy object destined to rot. But despite the apparent rejection of the body, it remains central to Christian belief.[57]

I Know What You Mean: Reading the Mannequin Body

Feminist attempts to conflate the ascetic and anorectic modes implies that these are consciously chosen political strategies. Within this scheme, both the modern anorectic and the medieval mystic are represented as feminist heroines. But this reading is open to question. Joan Brumberg argues that if anorexia is in any way political, it is "a severely limited and infantile form of politics, directed primarily at parents (and self) and without any sense of allegiance to a larger collectivity." Critics who attempt to transform the stance of the anorectic from victimhood to empowerment reflect "how desperate people are to find in the cultural model some kind of explanatory framework, or comfort, that dignifies this

confusing and complex disorder."[58] Her point has obvious implications for the historiography of food refusal, suggesting that the irresistible urge to decode a female fasting body which grips early modern commentators and twentieth-century historians alike leads to the production of fallacious assumptions, which, however well intentioned, deprive the individual woman of the possibility of articulating her experience in her own terms. A feminist reading may have an equally deterministic effect on female subjectivity as a misogynistic one.

Martha J. Reineke has considered the issue of power in relation to the putative 'antecedents' of anorectics, medieval women mystics. She implicates late medieval theology's emphasis upon the imitation of Christ's passion as creating an environment in which the intensity of bodily experience was privileged. The theology of *imitatio Christi* was particularly attractive to women, for whom extreme ascetic discipline provided a way of cleansing themselves from Eve's sinfulness. But the fact that extreme piety was inscribed upon the female body by hegemonic discourse limits the potential for women to empower themselves through ascetic practice. For Reineke, the bodies of the women mystics are always already "colonized," not so much "free" as "fractured by the conditions of their production within the larger social body of late medieval Christianity."[59]

The unresolved conflict over the body within Christian theology--whether to deny or embrace it--results in the self-immolation of the mystic, who rejects flesh only to become consumed herself. Because her asceticism reiterates but never resolves the ambivalence towards the body, she is unable to transcend the carnal and attain the spiritual freedom she seeks. Psychological research has suggested that women are far more likely than men to 'somatize' emotional and

psychic pain, expressing it as a physical symptom. Anorexia nervosa, although not strictly categorized as a conversion or somatization disorder, is a condition in which the body is 'highjacked' by the self in a bid for autonomy as a way of alleviating psychic pain. The metaphor is, of course, apposite in the sense that the anorectic's desire to triumph over her body is an exercise in futility, just as the mystic could not 'do away' with her body without destroying herself.

In the same way that the anorectic somatizes her anxieties, the position of female asceticism in relation to patriarchal culture has been regarded not as oppositional, but as an internalization of female subjugation. Sara Maitland, the feminist theologian, has written on the Peruvian saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617). In her article 'Passionate Prayer: Masochistic Images in Women's Experience,' Maitland argues that extreme ascetic practices are symptomatic of women's sado-masochistic relation to God. The violent self-mortification to which Rose subjects herself causes Maitland to wince in the same way as supposedly 'liberated' women might be appalled if confronted by an apparently acquiescent and passive victim of domestic abuse. The only way that Maitland can assimilate Rose's behaviour into her ontological reality is to pathologize it. Women mystics, she insists, are trapped within an impossible struggle for perfection which merely serves to reiterate their gendered insufficiency. Maitland imagines the dominating voice of God, the tyrant whose message is not merely that women deserve to suffer, but that they should submit willingly, even joyously, to it: "'Repent, repent, repent. Punish your stinking self and become worthy. If you don't enjoy the suffering that proves you are proud and need it; if you do enjoy the suffering that proves how much I love

you.'"[60]

Three years later, Maitland showed that a positive feminist critique of female asceticism was possible when she revisited the subject in 'Rose of Lima: Some Thoughts on Purity and Penance.' She emphasized the potential for empowerment available to women who chose a radical approach to pious spirituality. Maitland no longer counts herself amongst those: "Contemporary feminist writers [who] have seen [Rose]...as a demonstration of the extreme body hatred and guilt that a patriarchal religion lays upon women." Maitland insists that: "there are other ways of understanding or looking at extremes of penitential life which can suggest in them sources, not of neurotic repression but of freedom and self-ownership."[61] Rose was innovative because she rejected the limits of culturally-proscribed gendered religiosity. The issue of spiritual purity was a mechanism of empowerment rather than denigration for Rose precisely because she personalized its meaning in her own terms.

Maitland's *volte-face* is suggestive not only of the potential pitfalls of a feminist approach to asceticism, but also of the way in which critics have tended to imagine the body: as an object which only becomes meaningful in the process of being scrutinized. Hermeneutic theories of bodily gestures and postures originate from the premise that the meaning of the body is inferred. Unless it is decoded, bodily expression is essentially meaningless. Maud Ellmann concurs with this notion in her book *Hunger Artists*, reading the starving body as a performance in which the anorectic colludes:

> Even though the anorectic body seems to represent a radical negation of the other, it still depends on the other as spectator in order to be *read* as representative of anything at

all. Thus its emaciation, which seems to indicate a violent rebuff, also bespeaks a strange adventure in seduction.[62]

By referring to the physical signs of emaciation as "the savage hieroglyphics of its (i.e. the body's) suffering," Ellmann suggests that the anorectic's psychic pain has to be authorized (that is, acknowledged) by observers.[63] As a significant cultural event, discourse is generated from the interface between the fasting body and its audience(s), but the idea that meaning is entirely inferred on the part of the audience is problematic. Within Ellmann's scheme, only two positions are possible: that of the spectator and the spec[tac]ular body. The starving body, although regarded as a product of intentionality, is not presumed to have the words to express this. Therefore, the audience compensates by deciphering the spectacle. Initially, this appears to suggest a symbiotic relationship between the inarticulacy of the starving body and its spectators. But Ellmann does not consider whether a discrepancy exists between the motives behind self-starvation and its public exegesis. If the anorectic has virtually no influence over how her behaviour is interpreted, discrepancies are inevitable.

In this chapter we have already seen some of the flaws associated with perceiving the fasting body as a cipher or mannequin and privileging the viewpoint of the observer (whether historical contemporary or modern critic). Maitland recognizes that her visceral reaction to the asceticism of Rose of Lima misrepresented Rose's self-assertion as pathological violence. Whatever the intentions of the feminist critic, by condemning women ascetics she implicitly colludes with misogynistic readings of women as simultaneously mad and bad.

The secularization thesis can also be implicated as effectively silencing the potential meanings self-starvation or fasting has for women who practice it. A number of critics have rejected the notion of progressive secularization, persuasively arguing that modern anorectics continue to encode their self-starvation with religious meaning. Gail Corrington comments that anorectics regard their fasting as "a form of *askesis*, a discipline of the body for the sake of a 'higher purpose.'"[64] For both anorectics and ascetics, subjugating the needs of the body is a way of asserting an identity which transcends the bodily.

Caroline Giles Banks is strongly opposed to the assumption that religious values and beliefs no longer feature in the motivation and symbolism of food refusal. Her case studies of two anorectic women demonstrate the extent to which their religious fundamentalism informs upon and influences their anorexia. Banks asserts that the spiritual ideal of 'lightness' is conflated with the ideal of bodily 'thinness,' with the result that the pious imperatives constitute a motivational factor for anorexia.[65] In spite of research which demonstrates the significance of religiosity to anorectic women, the theoretical literature on eating disorders insists on the assumption that anorexia is a secular condition. This amounts to a conspiracy to silence women's subjective experience of embodiment. "Modern culture," Banks argues, "is far from being fully secularized."[66]

The transformation of women's food refusal into theoretical discourse has disabled rather than enabled the ability of women to speak about their own bodies. As represented in the clinical literature and in fiction, the anorectic is a liar who hoards food, deceives her family and friends about how much she eats, and disguises her emaciated body by wearing volumnious jumpers.

Similarly, Rudolph Bell has portrayed his 'holy anorexics' as girls who manipulated their families and acquaintances. The title of an American 'factional' movie about anorexia, *The Best Little Girl in the World* (1986), symbolizes the anorectic transformation from the obedient, polite adolescent girl who never answers back into a devious, secretive and rebellious 'bad' girl.

But it is possible to read this putative duplicity as a strategy of psychological survival for the anorectic who increasingly experiences herself as the exposed object of a scopophilic and omniscient audience. Josie, the twenty-five year old heroine of Jenefer Shute's novel *Life Size*, describes the regime of the eating disorders unit where she is a patient as profoundly disempowering. One evening Josie's nurse, Suzanne, asks her permission to search her room for hoarded food (a 'pathological' behaviour strictly prohibited inside the unit). Josie ridicules the notion that she has any influence over her nurse: "What choice do I have, powerless as a child, forced to lie and scheme simply to exercise the elementary-alimentary-right to determine what does and doesn't go into my body?"[67] Josie suggests that the restrictions on her "alimentary" rights constitute violations of "elementary" human rights: inside the unit, she becomes a 'non-person.' The hidden food is removed, Josie is reprimanded, and Suzanne goes to attend to her other patients, leaving Josie feeling more helpless and resentful than ever.

Anorectic fiction has followed the seminal autobiographical accounts of anorexia, like Sheila MacLeod's *The Art of Starvation* (1981), in attempting to recover the voice of the anorectic woman. The very fact that an increasing number of contemporary novels address the issue of eating disorders points to the absence of this

voice in the popular enculturation of anorexia and bulimia nervosa. The protagonist of Stephanie Grant's novel *The Passion of Alice* comments how she has tried to explain the motivation for her anorexia to the counsellors at Seaview Psychiatric Hospital, but to no avail. The staff regard the patients as "persons without free will. Incapable of choice. They have neat square boxes for everything in their world, and I must fit in the box that says self-starving equals self-hate." However, as Alice points out, the counsellors "could not be more wrong." She proceeds to challenge one of the most persistent assumptions about anorexia, that anorectics continue to see a fat body in the mirror even when severely emaciated. Alice remarks that this myth arose due to people's reluctance to accept the truth, which is that "we prefer ourselves this way, boiled-down bone, essence."[68] The public finds a slender size 10 female body more palatable (and indeed, desirable) than the walking skeleton of an Auschwitz camp survivor.

Alice compares her anorexia to Gnosticism, a radical faction of early Roman Catholicism which stressed the importance of knowledge over faith. Like the Gnostics, who enouraged individualist interpretations of Christ's life, Alice defines herself as a dissenter. She avers: "I am committed to the Gnostic tenet that says my own experience, my own insights, are as significant as the beliefs of the Orthodox, who simply have the good fortune of being in power."[69] For Alice, anorexia is a conflict between an oppositional self and an institution which is trying to replace it with a compliant and pliable self. Her identification with Gnosticism is a psychic defence mechanism. Recognizing her powerlessness within the institution, Alice is nevertheless determined not to be assimilated into the psychiatric taxonomy.

The stifling of the anorectic's voice by a rigid and dogmatic therapeutic regime is replicated in much of the theory and criticism of eating disorders. Novels like *Life-Size* and *The Passion of Alice* attempt to recover this voice. As Caroline Giles Banks has argued, the experience of the anorectic is absent or misrepresented in the clinical literature. The novel constitutes a legitimate space in which this experience can be communicated and validated. Is it possible to locate a space for gendered subjectivity within seventeenth-century texts analogous to the late modern testimonial mode of the anorectic? Within seventeenth-century texts which attempt to explicate a contentious cultural events, the 'voice' of the woman faster is remote and unreconstituted. How then can her subjectivity be recovered?

The preceding analysis of some of the approaches to anorexia nervosa, asceticism and historical inedia has considered a number of questions which relate to historiography and transcultural studies. At this point we can debate the usefulness of this research as a critical and interpretative tool. The argument that anorexia nervosa is a culture-bound syndrome is a persuasive one, and there is no ethical or critical justification for diagnosing women in history as anorectics. I have already expressed unease about the wisdom of treating cases like that of Mr. Dukes's daughter as anorexia. If we accept that anorexia *as we understand it* is a culture-bound syndrome, we should similarly treat early modern food refusal as specific to the historical and social circumstances from which it arose. Therefore, anorexia and early modern inedia should be understood as fundamentally different.

Despite these caveats, I want to argue that twentieth-century theory on anorexia nervosa can legitimately be used by the historian

of the early modern period. It can constitute a cognitive tool with which we can interrogate the competing discourses of religion, science, politics and popular belief which attempt to ascribe meaning to female inedia. As our critique of approaches to medieval asceticism suggests, the process of making the anomolous body comprehensible is often a reductive one, paring down the multiplicity and signifying excess of the body down to a single, unitary meaning. The fasting body is represented in early modern texts as a mannequin from which meaning is inferred.

But as we develop new approaches to embodiment, moving away from a notion of the body as a vehicle for communication which becomes intelligible only through its audience, towards the body as a cultural practice deployed by the subjective self, it becomes possible to devise a critical reading of early modern texts which recuperates fasting as it is subjectively experienced by women. Sonja van't Hof, describing the cultural transformations of inedia, remarks that what she defines as "psychological fasting," meaning that which contained "private, individual meaning" for the woman who practiced it, has not been observed prior to the nineteenth century.[70] Although she admits that it may have existed in previous periods, the point is that the interpretation of inedia is deterministic and effaces the way it is actually experienced.

Since interiority predates the development of psychological theory, the subjective meaning of female inedia can also be assumed despite its elision by interpretations which are dominant or competing for dominance. Since seventeenth-century fasting women do not publish their own accounts of their inedia, their subjectivities lie within mediated texts: that is, texts whose authors are likely to be male and who participate in the spectatorship of women's inedia.

But it is at the interstices of such texts where opportunities exist for the historian to assess women's use of fasting as a cultural practice and to problematize the exegesis of female inedia which denies women's competence as social agents.

We have already considered the ways in which accounts of women's prophetic utterance transcend the body. In the case of Anna Trapnel, the afflicted female body is perceived as an authentic expression of piety while her voice (which remains suspect) is either absent or modified by God. For Trapnel's supporters, the currency of her performative body lies in its power as an incontestable sign. But hers is a body from which all vestiges of femininity, irrationality and selfhood have been removed. Paradoxically, female bodily experience can also enable women to gain access to language and print culture. In her own account of her prophetic activities, Trapnel describes the emotionality and physicality of her experiences. She foregrounds the gendered subjectivity which is annexed in the third-person accounts compiled by her supporters and editors. Relations between prophecy and the body are, to say the least, ambivalent.

Therefore, inedia can be considered within a larger debate about women, writing and knowledge during the early modern period. The numerous texts generated by cases of fasting women constitute a valuable resource of both popular and elite knowledge about the female body. As a cultural analogue of ecstatic prophecy, inedia problematizes the relation between women's experiences of embodiment and the texts which appropriate them. Vincenzo diNicola invents the term "anorexia multiforme" to encompass the discrete cultural and historical manifestations of food refusal.[71] As an effort to issue a moratorium on the admittedly rather circular debate about the legitimacy of comparing ascetic and anorectic behaviour,

it is a reasonable suggestion, but it seems that the critics' hunger to produce a conclusive analysis of the relationship between women, culture and food is unlikely to be satisfied. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine a number of cases of female inedia which are atypical in the sense that they do not conform to received ideas about the fasting girl phenomenon. I will suggest that the distinction between religion and science which is central to the taxonomy of inedia as conceived by historians and critics needs to be reassessed as fundamentally arbitrary. We need to restore precisely what the commentators of seventeenth-century inedia and twentieth-century eating disorders try to erase: a sense of female inedia as multiple, chaotic and problematic. In this way, we will retain a reading of the fasting body as innovation and self-assertion which is not cancelled out by but coexists with elements of futility and self-destructiveness.

Jane Taunton's Hunger Strike: Constructing an Oppositional Self in Seventeenth-Century Consumer Culture

In 1669, Nathaniel Fairfax sent a letter to Henry Oldenburg, Secretary to the Royal Society between 1662 and 1677, about a woman of Woodbridge, Suffolk who attempted to starve herself almost to death. Fairfax (1637-1690) was a minister and physician who received his Master of Arts degree from Corpus Christi college, Cambridge in 1661. He was ejected from a perpetual curacy of Willisham in 1662 and qualified as a physician in 1670. Fairfax was a *virtuoso*, a provincial natural philosopher who corresponded regularly with Oldenburg from Suffolk.[72] For his part, Henry Oldenburg was a prodigious correspondent, in contact with both national and

international writers on scientific matters.

Correspondence played a central role in the formation of the early Royal Society.[73] The epistolary medium constituted an important vehicle for scientific communication during the seventeenth century. The history of this institution began in 1644, when Gresham College, situated in Holborn, London, carved a niche for itself as an alternative to the traditional universities, providing an informal meeting-place for individuals interested in science. In 1662 the college received crown recognition and became the Royal Society. It rapidly gained international prestige as a forum for intellectual exchange between eminent scholars such as Robert Hooke and Edmund Halley. It levied a membership charge of forty shillings, to help cover the costs of publishing the *Philosophical Transactions*.[74] When the Fellows and members of the Society convened, one of their activities was to debate the scientific validity of the reports it received from its many correspondents. Thomas Sprat, the author of *The History of the Royal Society* (1669), documents the Society's statutes, noting that one of John Wilkins's and Henry Oldenburg's duties as the first secretaries for the Society was to preside over these debates:

> *The business of their weekly Meetings shall be, To order, take account, consider, and discourse of Philosophical Experiments, and Observations: to read, hear, and discourse upon Letters, Reports, and other Papers, containing Philosophical matters, as also to view, and discourse upon the productions and rarities of Nature, and Art: and to consider what to deduce from them, or how they may be improv'd for use, or discovery.*[75]

Above all, according to Sprat, the primary function of the Royal Society was to create "faithful *Records*, of all the Works of *Nature*, or *Art*, which can come within [its] reach."[76] It assumed a moderate position between credulity and scepticism, evaluating the information it received to ascertain its veracity. Sprat's text was originally conceived as an advertisment for the Society, aimed at getting the public's interest and answering its critics. What Sprat actually produced was an *apologia* which confronted the argument that the Royal Society was irreligious. The implications of the Royal Society's problematic public image will be discussed in due course, but the point to note here is that Sprat wanted to emphasize the Society's commitment to empiricism. Fairfax's letter was copied into the letter books by a Dr. Croon, who was probably a clerk employed in administrative duties. A full transcript of the letter appears in Appendix I.

The subject of Fairfax's letter is Jane Taunton, an unmarried woman aged about twenty-three whose parents are both deceased. In the spring of 1669, she began to refuse virtually all food and drink for a period of about ten weeks. Fairfax, who lodged in the same house as Taunton, became her physician and much of his letter constitutes a clinical record of her physical and mental deterioration and eventual recovery. Fairfax begins his letter to Oldenburg by assuming a pose of self-deprecation. As the auditor of Jane Taunton's elective fast, he avers: "more to gratify your Curiosity, than that I judge it very instructive philosophically, I have taken occassion to pen it, & that brokenly too." At the same time, Fairfax is well aware of Henry Oldenburg's influential position within the Royal Society, and obviously believes Taunton's case has some scientific value. It would be inappropriate to regard Oldenburg's beliefs as being

synonymous with the Society's, nor overstate any effect his opinions could have, but his professional life clearly has some bearing on Fairfax' s decision to write. For the historian, the case is fascinating precisely because it contains a third-person account of Taunton' s motivation to fast, an aspect which is usually tantalizingly absent from accounts of early modern inedia.

Fairfax describes Taunton's social condition at the onset of her inedia as one of genteel poverty. Since she was orphaned, Taunton has for an unspecified period of time relied on her inheritance to pay for her comfortable lifestyle. Fairfax politely but pointedly remarks that she is "very fat of Body, but handsome, having appetite & Digestion both of Solide & Liquides beyond what is usuall with those of her Qualifications."[77] The amount of money is finite, and Taunton becomes uncomfortably aware that she has no means of supporting herself once it has been used up. Forced to consider her options, Taunton is heavily influenced by her social status and notions of appropriately decorous conduct. Since she is unable to secure any "gentell method" of raising an income for herself, Taunton opts for "a new found Invention of fasting" to provide a solution to her economic problems.[78] Fairfax' s turn of phrase is intriguing, demonstrating both the promotion of pious fasting (as we have seen) but also Taunton's perception of fasting as a modish activity which she can legitimately appropriate to suit her personal circumstances. Taunton is apparently under no illusions about the inevitable result of permanently fasting, which she justifies as entirely consistent with her status as a gentlewoman:

> Her principle was this, that it was more commendable for her to die than to do any thing unworthy of her as a Gentlewoman; but to

be beholden to kindred for assistence of livelihood, or otherwise betake herself to the Artifices of the Yeomanry, was such. Now as for laying violent hands on herself, she was against that, because the fruit of an hasty passion or moodiness, which were rudenesses ill becoming such a Daughter of Reason & Courtship, as she must bear herself.[79]

In addition to appropriating the notion of seemly and proper behaviour, Taunton represents her fast as the purposeful act of the ethical self by appealing to a transcendent notion of military altruism. In so doing, she indicates that she is conscious that her behaviour could be interpreted as suicide. Taunton insists that: "Nor might this be self murther any more than a soldiers exposing his body in the field, when a cowardly flight might save him."[80] She does not see any contradiction between her fast and her religious beliefs: both are "virtuous." Although comparing her decision to the soldier's acceptance of death implies that she recognizes prolonged fasting will result in her death, Taunton does not define herself as suicidal. She rejects not life itself but rather the dependency and neediness which life as an impoverished woman compels her to. Taunton identifies with the self-disgust of the deserting soldier: to become the recipient of charity is to experience the humiliation of abjection. Instead, she seeks liberation through self-sufficiency. She denies herself food in order to survive: her aim is not to kill herself, as she argues, but to make life tolerable.

Jane Taunton's *apologia* suggests that what she is rejecting is precisely the materialism which defines women's status as always dependent and subordinate, a commodity transferred between fathers and husbands. The shift from regarding food as a sensual object to a

strict practice of asceticism is symptomatic of the way Taunton politicizes her body and its appetites. When economics interfers with desire, Taunton's body becomes a liability, its greed unaffected by her urgent need to regulate and restrict it. Notice that Taunton constructs a split between body and self, in which her resentment at a culture which disenfranchizes her is displaced onto the body. Taunton's position is analogous to that of an individual with an addictive personality attempting to defeat a chronic addiction as a result of pressure from family, friends or work colleagues. External circumstances try to modify the addictive behaviour. Thus, Taunton creates a depersonalization scenario in which she envisages her body as dangerously out of control, voracious and unregulated by her conscious self, which *does* want to stop. The desires of the body serve to exacerbate her descent into poverty, in which she will be compelled to seek financial aid even though the notion is abhorrent to her. Fasting is a way of restoring the authority of the self and repressing the body's rebellion. As Susie Orbach comments in *Hunger Strike*: "The body has come to represent the existence and insistence of needs. The doing away with the body, then, is an attempted solution to the unpredictable appearance of need."[81] To have no needs is to be invulnerable, protected from the anxiety and uncertainty which are a result of unexpected change.

By rejecting the cultural imperative of consumption because it causes her intolerable psychic distress, does Jane Taunton's behaviour constitute a form of social protest? Is her inedia, signifying her refusal to be a material(ist) girl, also a critique of early modern consumer culture? Bryan Turner has dismissed the notion that what eating disorders are chiefly 'about' is the pursuit of the slender body. Instead, he views them as challenges to the social

order, not targetted at patriarchy *per se*, but the consumerism of late capitalism. Turner argues that anorexia and bulimia nervosa are: "two individuated forms of protest which employ the body as a medium of protest against the consumer-self."[82] It would be a mistake, however, to equate materialism with twentieth-century capitalism. Turner's definition of eating disorders as attempts to contest mass consumption can also be applied to the Restoration England which 'produces' Jane Taunton. Since she experiences seventeenth-century culture as one which represses the development of individuation, Taunton appropriates fasting as a 'selfing' mechanism, allowing her to transcend the enmeshment of economic and communal relations. If we concur with the view that in the twentieth century, the needs of the self are privileged over those of the community, it might be argued that modern readers are more likely to interpret Taunton's case as a struggle for individuation. But Taunton's deployment of her body as a manifesto for autonomy is problematized by her ambivalence towards the issue of suicide, which she both sanctions and repudiates.

It's My Body and I'll Die If I Want To: The Sexual Politics of Suicide

Within the Christian tradition, suicide has always been regarded as a heinous crime, on a par with (or even worse than) murder. During the seventeenth century, the attitude of the courts towards those who attempted suicide was severe and punitive. Punishment was extended to relatives and even the communities in which the would-be suicide lived, if they were found to have colluded with or aided the offender. As Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy show in their study of

suicide in early modern England, attitudes to suicide changed radically after the Restoration and throughout the eighteenth century. Those who killed themselves were subsequently treated with sympathy and leniency.[83] Although Restoration England may be considered a transitional period, we should recall the pitfalls of the secularization thesis--and note that Taunton's engagement with concepts of suicide indicates that it was a crucial factor in her narrative self-fashioning. For observers to regard her behaviour as suicidal would have a severely detrimental effect on whatever message Taunton hoped to communicate. It is not clear from Fairfax's letter whether or not Taunton's permission was obtained before he wrote to Henry Oldenburg, or even if she was aware of her physician's intentions to write her up a case history, but it certainly appears that Taunton's articulacy is a deliberate strategy to win her audience. She needs to confront the imperatives against suicide to appear credible.

One of the significant developments in early modern theorizations of suicide was the widening of the term to include forms of behaviour which were not immediately or directly fatal. John Syms's *Lifes Preservative Against Self-Killing* (1637) was one of the most influential texts on suicide. In his introduction to the Routledge facsimile edition, Michael MacDonald remarks that the significance of Sym's work is: "the recognition that certain specific behaviours are suicidal," such as alcoholism and pathological asceticism.[84] Sym defined "indirect" suicide as death by "omission." Such an individual, he wrote, "shall stubbornly and foolishly refuse to eate, or drinke; in that *measure* or *kinde* that is requisite for his preservation, by abstinency, and sparing, either starving himselfe to death; or breeding in himselfe and contracting that which kills

him." To "*gormandize*" oneself (yield to gluttony) was the other, equally undesirable extreme.[85] Sym advocates fasting practiced within the perimeters of Protestant moderation. He argued that those contemplating suicide were guilty of a multiple, not a single, crime. An "unjust and unnatural suffering," suicide is a sin "against *God*, and their *Neighbours* immediately; but even against *themselves*...a crime of the vilest nature."[86]

Despite its definitional clarity and condemnation of self-killing, Sym can still conceive of actions which put life at risk but are nonetheless admirable and not suicidal. He writes: "For a man to expose his owne life to danger for the publike good; for his faith, for the true religion, and for other good and honest causes; it is not only commendable, but also sometimes necessary."[87] The similarity between Sym's distinctly militaristic language and Jane Taunton's justification of her fast as non-suicidal is striking. Did Taunton read Sym's book? Evidently, although she was literate, Taunton's reading material was limited. Fairfax remarks that she was: "a devoted Affecter of Romances," and she would, of course, have read the Bible.[88] Since we can assume that the notions of suicide Sym wrote about would have been disseminated by ministers, and been absorbed into the communal 'bank' of cultural knowledge available to the public, it is an irrelevant question. Taunton was aware of the sort of arguments propounded by writer like Sym, whether she read them herself or had them filtered down to her in the form of sermons. She uses the metaphor of the honourable soldier because it constitutes an exemplary case where life is risked for the benefit of the community. But, in doing so, Taunton comes perilously close to admitting a desire for self-annihilation, and even to justifying suicide as a legitimate option available to the autonomous agent.

Is Taunton therefore claiming that her fast, as a potentially harmful activity, is actually socially beneficial? Seen in the context of her resentment as an impoverished woman compelled to seek charitable assistance, it is debatable whether Taunton regards 'the community' as a system of reciprocal benefits exchanged between the structure and its members. She problematizes the notion of the community as something which all of its members experience as mutually advantageous. But it is Taunton's appropriation of the good soldier which exposes 'the community' as a flawed ideological construct. Attempting to legitimize her fast by aligning it with the selflessness of the soldier, Taunton simultaneously recognizes the gender specificity of the military figure both herself and Sym allude to, and which denies her any possibility of identifying with the brave soldier. A 'virtuous,' self-conscious death is only available to men. By breaking the silence supposedly endemic to fasting women, Taunton seems to initiate a debate about the social obligations of the body and to whom, or what, it belongs. In her autobiography, Sheila MacLeod reads Thomas Szasz's *Law, Liberty, and Psychiatry* (1974) and is persuaded by his analysis of the body's engagement in a political debate or protest:

> My insight into my own motivations in "choosing" anorexia began when I read this statement: 'Addiction, obesity, starvation (anorexia nervosa) are political problems, not psychiatric; each condenses and expresses a contest between the individual and some other person or persons in his environment over the individual's body.' This was the most cogent view of anorexia nervosa I had ever come across...Szasz's observation struck me with the force of revelation. And he goes on to ask some

> similarly pertinent questions: 'To whom does a person's body belong? Does it belong to his parents, as it did, to a very large extent, when he was a child? Or to the state? Or to the sovereign? Or to God? Or, finally, to himself?'[89]

What is assumed is that the body is 'owned' by everyone except the individual whose body it is (an interpretation is a form of ownership, because it concerns the securing or locating of an object). Consequently, the anorectic or fasting body constitutes a contested site, where the woman herself has no privileged status. She must compete with other constructions of her fasting body in an attempt to define what is 'read' there. Taunton attempts to recuperate her fast as an expressive and intentional act from being (mis)read as a perversion of divine will and community values. Thus far, we have considered Taunton's fast as a hunger strike and ethical suicide. But to properly assess her behaviour we need to focus on what happened to her both during the fast and after she terminated it.

As a physician, Fairfax devotes most of his letter to a daily description of her dietary practices and symptoms. Taunton begins to abstain from food and drink in April, allowing herself an occasional Seville orange or lemon to relieve the 'furry' sensation on her tongue, and sometimes imbibes small amounts of small beer. She also denies herself tobacco, which she was accustomed to smoke. By the middle of May, Taunton is unable to walk in her chamber, feels permanently cold and is afflicted by severe headaches, fainting fits and pain in her limbs. For the first fortnight, Fairfax describes how:"she lived under extreme hunger & cravings, & had scurvy remembrances by gripes & stitches, which not being able sometimes to keep to herself, when with us, she was fain to retire." The term

anorexia nervosa, derived from the Greek, literally translates as a nervous loss of appetite, but anorectics display considerable pride at withstanding feelings of hunger. This hunger never disappears, but becomes easier to resist, which in fact is what Taunton claims to Fairfax after the first week.[90]

In the middle of April, Taunton begins to smoke again, which, Fairfax tells us, caused her to defecate for the first time since she began her fast. She gargles salt water to relieve her bleeding gums, a symptom of scurvy (vitamin C deficiency) despite drinking citrus juices. She reduces her intake of beer. During this period, the physical signs of her fast start to proliferate, with nearly a new symptom every day for Fairfax to record.[91] Taunton suffers from persistent insomnia, unable to get to sleep until four a.m. She begins to look emaciated and her pulse is very low. The relationship between Fairfax and Taunton's body is one of clinical intimacy: he scrutinizes her excretions, testing her urine with uroscopy (an early modern diagnostic practice) and finding it a deeper yellow than that of a patient suffering from scurvy. Fairfax's diary notes and his letter to Oldenburg constitute an iconography of the starving body, in which Taunton's symptomatic body is perceived as a mutable and florid performance.

By the third week, Taunton is bed-ridden, unable to get warm but refusing a fire in her bed-chamber, because it made her feel faint. She eventually gives up her gentlewomanly pursuits of needlework "at which she was ingen-ious," according to Fairfax, and reading, because her eyes hurt. On the eighteenth day, Taunton exhibits signs of mental confusion ("wild in her head...her head fared so confusedly") and she complained of abdominal pain. Her menstrual periods became irregular and she suffered frequent fits of fainting.

By the beginning of June, Fairfax describes how Taunton is afflicted by night sweats and convulsions. Previously, she had behaved "like a Roman" and endured all her suffering with a stoic resignation. But now "they extorted out-cries" and Taunton "continued much in the Condition of a Woman in travel at times."[92] Although Taunton's fertility is compromised by amenorrhoea as a consequence of her inedia, Fairfax nevertheless interprets her suffering as 'maternal.'

At the outset of her fast, it is probable that Taunton believed she could survive without food. Research has shown that initially, the anorectic experiences sensations of euphoria. The denial of food is perceived as self-assertion, and the anorectic revels in what may be the first time she has felt successful and in control. As Margaret Miles has argued, asceticism is a form of perverse pleasure. It becomes addictive because greater achievements are necessary to produce pleasurable feelings. The 'no pain, no gain' maxim is seized upon with alacrity by the anorectic. The gains are immense; she can live forever, unencumbered by the wasteful and corrupting greed which grips everyone else.

But the paradox of anorexia nervosa is that the sensation of euphoric liberation is displaced by the virtual enslavement of the anorectic to the body she was initially attempting to make redundant. While she may continue to feel, in Susan Bordo's words, "invulnerable," to her family and friends, by starving her body, she is risking her life.[93] By not consuming food, she is consuming *herself.* She becomes obsessed with her body and its physiology to the extent that the aspiration of one of Hilde Bruch's patients to rule like a tyrant over her own body is reversed, with the body itself becoming the tyrant which engrosses all the attention and energy of

the anorectic.[94]

Does something like an awareness of the fact that the body cannot be escaped or denied occur to Jane Taunton, leading to the realization that her fast has been futile? Fairfax offers his own explanation as to why, on the eighteenth of June, over two and a half months since she began starving herself, Taunton ended her fast. He writes:

> either thro` fear of Death, or sense of pain, or both she was fain to give in, & rising betimes dress'd for a walk, which she was confident she could go thro,` her spirit was so bent upon it.

Fairfax and Taunton's nurse "halled" their patient a mile beyond Woodbridge, stopping frequently to allow her to rest, from where Taunton hired a horse and travelled to Ipswitch.[94] It was while staying here that Taunton took her first meal: some buttered peas, which immediately made her sick. After that, she ate some strawberries "& that day Nature befriended her by stool," Fairfax notes with a physician's relish. He evidently remained in contact with Taunton, although it is not clear from the letter whether or not she returns to Woodbridge. At the time of writing, she remains unable to tolerate "Flesh-meat" or butter. Still pale and wan, she has resumed "Diet with as much waryness, as she had forsaken it with rashness." The headaches and spells of dizzyness which began while she was fasting still occur, but infrequently. Fairfax calls his patient "as great an Instance of a trifling Resolver, as she was before of an adventurous Faster." After she had ended her fast, Fairfax asked Taunton "how her stomack stood to fictuals." Her answer was "that she neither craved food, nor loathed it." Fairfax's closing

comments on Jane Taunton indicate his belief in her credibility: he doubts she tried to deceive him by concealing food (or "corner-bits," as he puts it). He concludes his account with a Latin motto: "*Nature is content with little.*"[95]

The account ends, and the reader can only speculate about the questions it leaves unanswered. In the process of recovering, Taunton seems to suggest that her previous emotional attachment to food was pathological. Food is no longer an object of desire or disgust: it's 'just' food. Presumably, she has adopted a more moderate attitude towards eating. As a coda to Taunton's self-starvation, this has a profoundly reductive effect on her use of food as a cultural practice and a form of symbolic expression. As an alternative mode of eating/consumption, inedia is being represented not as political resistance, but as aberrant.

Crucially, it leaves the reader ignorant of the nature of Taunton's economic situation after her return to 'normal' eating behaviour. There is no basis for believing that her circumstances have improved at all. Perhaps it is churlish to criticize Nathaniel Fairfax for failing to carry out follow-up research on his patient, since he adds to what might have been a purely clinical account of self-starvation an insight into Taunton's interiority, which we would more likely expect from a nineteenth-century case history written by Freud. Nevertheless, Fairfax's final judgements on the case and Jane Taunton's reappraisal of her behaviour appear to be attempts at closure, containing the subversiveness of the fast as an exercise of free will and restoring Taunton's status as a member of a collective group. Her recovery is achieved once she gains insight into her pathology. At a point of synchronicity between the end of the narrative and Taunton's return to health, her body is reinscribed

with the obligations of membership to the very community she was trying to escape.[96]

The text's closing remarks do not lessen the symbolic power of Taunton's starving body, only try to modify it. Regardless of whether Taunton envisaged a local audience of Woodbridge inhabitants, or a more public, formal confrontation with the Royal Society, she evidently wanted to participate in the debate which was very interested in her body but apparently not at all interested in her. Her text within Fairfax's letter is a response, revealing more about how observers might position Taunton than how she might choose to position herself. The body of a fasting woman is often assumed to be 'provocative,' as if she colludes in the audience's fascination by engineering a performance. But this is a distortion: how much influence does the female faster have over the appropriation of her body? It seems likely that her subjectivity will be effaced by those who debate the meaning of her body.

Producing testimony, either by writing or speaking about the meanings of the behaviour, enables the female subject to situate the ambiguous language of the body within the context of specific cultural and psychological determinants. By suggesting how Jane Taunton's inedia can be compared with the anorectic's experience, I have emphasized the role of articulacy in the construction of a gendered subjectivity. In a patriarchal culture where women's silence perpetuates their exclusion from defining their own experience, the production of testimony is not merely therapeutic, but combative.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will be focusing on scientific and religious interpretations of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century cases of female inedia, suggesting that the 'blazoning' of

women's bodily experience in texts written by male observers is analogous to the medico-legal invasions of that body. Just as we can question whether Jane Taunton had any influence in the publicizing of her self-starvation, it is possible to dispute the notion of the female faster as provocative and manipulative of her family, community and media. In particular, I will be contesting the notion that the practitioners of early modern medicine, who were instrumental in deciding whether or not fasting women were credible, behaved with exemplary clinical detachment, objectivity and scepticism. Is the intimacy between women's bodies and male physicians problematic? What is fasting women's experience of celebrity and media notoriety actually like? Does it constitute a space for them to speak about their experiences, or does it elide their voices? These issues will be explored by analysing the cases of Martha Taylor, Mary Cory and Ann Jeffries.

The Com/pliant Body: Inedia in Restoration England

Previously in this chapter, we remarked briefly on John Reynold's text *A Discourse on Prodigious Abstinence* (1669), an exegesis of the case of Martha Taylor. Taylor, who acquired the titular epithet 'the Derbyshire Damosell,' also inspired two other printed texts, which arrived at radically different conclusions from those of Reynolds's. Hers is one of the most famous and well-documented cases of inedia. Taylor sustained a back injury in 1661 which left her chronically disabled. She began to refuse food in 1667. The three texts written about her all appeared in 1669: one by Thomas Robbins, a non-conformist minister; one by an ambitious scientist, John Reynolds; and the third by an anonymous individual known only as H.A. (whose

text, in following the practice of inferring meaning from an inarticulate female body, may be regarded as a masculine performance).

The phenomenon of the cluster in print culture suggests that the fasting woman was regarded as a marketable commodity, so much so that three different interpretations of one case was not seen as excessive, but, on the contrary, assured of an avid and fascinated audience. It is hardly surprising that printers were enthusiastic about cases of inedia. Taylor became something of a tourist attraction in her home town of Over-Haddon, near Bakewell. A steady stream of visitors passed through the family home. The local gentry were particularly intrigued, and were instrumental in publicizing Taylor's case. The Earl of Derbyshire arranged for a continuous twenty-four hour watch of Taylor, after which she was vindicated.[97] Both Robbins and H.A. consistently refer to the large number of witnesses, many of which are professional, noble or otherwise implicitly trustworthy individuals, to authenticate both Taylor and their own texts. The stringent, quasi-legal methods used to decide whether or not a fasting woman pretended to fast are voluntarily followed by the authors themselves.

If the reports of Taylor's case indicate the massive amount of interest a fasting woman could generate once she became visible, they also demonstrate how the fasting body is conceived of as a blank space upon which the observer can inscribe his own meaning. Furthermore, as the subject onto which rhetorical strategies are brought to bear, the fasting woman constitutes something of an early modern Rorschach test, from which spectators devise interpretations and conclusions which reveal more about *them* than they do of the individual they are scrutinizing. H.A., who witnessed Martha Taylor's inedia in person,

regards her as exceptionally pious. He argues that the physical suffering she has experienced have purified her to a state of near-perfect spirituality. "Afflictions are like the Fullers Teasles," he writes, "which are very sharp and scratching in themselves, yet serve to make the Cloth pure and fine."[98] In contrast, Thomas Robbins perceived Taylor as an example of divine providence, evincing God's love from heaven to humanity. He describes how Taylor, who was highly learned in the scriptures but lacked any pretensions to pride, exhorted everyone to faith, even though "the Guts of her body are almost dried up."[99] Robbins, who also visited Taylor and conversed with her, urged his readers to repent before it was too late.

Of the three texts, John Reynolds's is least concerned with biographical detail or witness testimony. He locates his theory of the survival during prolonged fasting not in the pseudo-legal investigative procedures fasting women were subjected to, but in scientific rationality. Reynolds debunks what he sees as superstitious credulity and miracle-mongering:

> Some persons as scant in their *reading*, as they are in their travels, are ready to deem every thing strange to be a monster, and every monster a miracle: true it is, the fast of *Moses*, *Elijah* and the Incarnate Word, was miraculous, and possibly of some others; yet why we should make all miracles, I understand not, for what need have we now of miracles?[100]

Reynolds reiterates the protestant annexing of belief in the existence of miracles to Roman Catholicism. During the early modern period, miracles were regarded as anachronistic: the 'age of miracles' was past. At the beginning of his text, Reynolds addresses

Sir Walter Needham, member and Curator Elect of the Royal Society, in which he assumes the pose of a scientific innovator, armed with revolutionary theories which will fundamentally challenge the existing world-view. Although, as his theories of fermentation are derivative, owing much to Thomas Willis, they are not exactly original. With a distinct note of triumphalism, Reynolds writes: "By this time, Sir, I hope you'l grant that the old inconvenient and tottering building is in a measure demolish'd, the rubbish removed, and the ground clear'd."[101] The metaphor is apt, for Reynolds's task is chiefly to 'rubbish' religious belief in the miraculous and providential. His aim is to encourage his readers to read phenomenon such as inedia with a degree of scepticism. It would be irreligious for Reynolds to claim that science is superior to religion. Instead, he argues that religion and science have fundamentally similar interests, namely the interpretation of experience and the search for truth. What he defines as 'superstition' is a perversion of these values, because the credulous are not judicious enough to distinguish between truth and error.

Having insisted that religion would be better off without its superstitious element, Reynolds proceeds to his fermentation thesis. He makes a series of remarks about the age, sexuality, brain and humoral physiology of women who abstain from food, which in total constitutes an aetiology of female inedia. Seventeenth-century scientific thinking held that the body was sustained by a digestive process which converted nutritious substances into a juice which was fermented by the blood. Reynolds suggests that fermentation of the blood is possible in the bodies of female abstinents because chyle, a catalyst for fermentation, is produced by the body even if none is ingested. Since they have thinner blood, less chyle is required to

ferment it.[102] Reynolds notes that the mean age of fasting women is between fourteen and twenty. The potentially harmful seminal humours stored within the virgin's body are acidic and used for fermentation, which compensates for a lack of food and drink. [103]

The fasting body, as Reynolds figures it, is a claustrophobic, chaotic space, in which "airy condensations and concretions, the flegmatick humours, colliquations of the parts" are "so closely shut up and barricado'd." These vapours can damage the brain and lead to a deficit in "common sense."[104] Although Reynolds implicates the physiology of young women in making survival on minimal or non-existent rations possible (in other words, demonstrating that fasting in adolescent girls is a naturally-occurring phenomenon), he nevertheless interprets female abstinents as symptomatic of a pathological body. Normative, embodied femininity is unruly, disordered and, given the potentially harmful proximity between the potent vapours in the brain, dangerously irrational. By dedicating his treatise to the Royal Society, John Reynolds hoped to attract its attention and in doing so enhance his prospects as a natural philosopher. Martha Taylor is little more than a vehicle for his theories. Significantly, she is absent from the scientific discussion which constitutes the bulk of the text. Taylor appears only at the end in the form of a relatively brief biography which, having used her name in his title, Reynolds is really obliged to do.

English cases of fasting women shared with their European counterparts the compulsory procedures of surveillance and verification to which a woman of whom allegations of inedia had been made was subjected. The assumption that early modern science enabled fasting women by validating their fasts via empirical methods

appears rather peculiar when one considers that the constant observation, intimate medical examinations and even inspection of excreta, constitute a panoptic invasion of woman's space in which she is denied agency. Refusing to comply with these investigations would be perceived as proof of fraud. To be credible, women had to submit to periods of surveillance anywhere between a few hours to weeks or even months. To assess what was problematic about the relationship between the compliant female body and the male physician's control over it, I will consider the early eighteenth-century case of Mary Cory.

Sub Rosa: Mary Cory and the Patient as Pretender

Contained within the British Library's Sloane collection of manuscripts is a letter written by a Fellow of the Royal Society, William Musgrave (1655?-1721). Musgrave was the Secretary of the Oxford Philosophical Society and later practiced as a physician in Exeter. He held the position of Secretary for the Royal Society between 1684-5, and was a member of the Council during 1684. In 1704, Musgrave wrote about his involvement with a girl called Mary Cory, a young girl who lived with her parents in Stratton. He heard about Cory in the spring of 1702, from a friend of his, Mr. J. Smith, who told him rumours about a girl who had allegedly lived without food or drink for a period of several months. Her parents openly invited "any discreat person" to accommodate Cory in their own house and judge for themselves the truth of her inedia. Cory had already 'passed' the inspection of one physician who had "declared in favor of the Girl, and establisht the reputation of her fasting." Cory stayed at Musgrave's house on two occasions, where she was placed under

surveillance.

From the outset, Musgrave decides that Cory is fraudulent (or, as he puts it, "an Abuse upon the Countray").[105] His definition of the nature of her falsehood is significant because it focuses on the seductiveness of the female body as a spectacle. Cory is guilty not of a minor falsehood but of exhibitionism on a grand scale, a calculated and manipulative attempt to delude an unwitting and credulous public. Musgrave implicates Mary Cory's father in acting as his daughter's publicist. Musgrave, who had been away on business, returns to Exeter to find that the case of the Stratton girl has proliferated into a full-scale media event. Mary Cory was still living under his roof, but intending to leave. Furiously, Musgrave sent a letter to Mr. Cory, threatening him with legal action. He "advised Him to talk no more of his daughters fasting as formerly He did; for that if He continued that trick in Exeter I would endeavour to have Him punisht." Shortly afterwards, Mr. Cory and his daughter returned to Stratton.[106]

Musgrave felt he had failed by allowing Mary Cory to expose herself to the public gaze without amassing the evidence which would reveal that she was a fraud. He regretted not ordering his maidservant to subject Cory to a thorough search, convinced that she had been concealing food during her stay. The remarks of his servants reinforce Musgrave's conviction that Cory had deceived his household. So he decided to hatch a plan that would categorically prove that Cory was lying. He approached Cory's parents again, claiming that he would be pleased to present them with his professional opinion, but that he would need to isolate Mary in his home so that he could properly evaluate her condition. As a further inducement, Musgrave offered "in some degree [to] make the Journey

easy to them." The parents accepted Musgrave's "offer," and returned Mary to Exeter. They are even amenable to whatever methods Musgrave regards as necessary. He should use "the strictest Course" in order to satisfy himself of Mary's credibility.[107]

On both occasions that Cory was living in his house, Musgrave claims she received the greatest hospitality, but her behaviour was rude, uncooperative and secretive. Despite being given the best room in the house, "and treated civilly; yet no person could be more uneasy, than she was, in my House." According to Musgrave, Cory regularly complained "with out any just reason."[108] He describes her attempts to elude the attention of the maidservant appointed to watch her and her dislike at being confined to her room. It may occur to the reader that Cory's unease is hardly surprising, given Musgrave's conviction of her guilt, his obsessive desire to expose her and the meticulous and intrusive nature of the surveillance process which the entire household participates in. None of this seems to have occurred to Musgrave, however, who describes one incident where Cory manages to escape from her solitary confinement:

> The first patricular, wherin she began to discover herself, was that contrary to the promise made by her father in her behalf she would not bare Confinement in a chamber; tho it was open, and airy, as almost any one chamber of any one House in the City; but would, and did goe fre-quently into, and hurry in the kitchen; where it was easie to elude the vigliance of her keeper.[109]

To Musgrave, Cory constitutes a challenging intellectual problem, and he clearly understands his role as that of a forensic rather than therapeutic physician. He envisages a 'body of evidence,' which

discloses its (i.e., Cory's) own duplicity. Physical traces produced by the body can be identified by the investigating physician, and used as the basis for an objective judgement on the validity of prodigious bodily experiences. Musgrave's convictions and the dedication of his household are rewarded when such traces are discovered. He finds cake crumbs in Cory's clothes and, one morning, her maid discovers that one of her shoes is full of urine. Musgrave, who up until this point had been unable to ascertain whether Cory excreted anything at all, triumphantly confronts Mr. Cory with his counterevidence. Mary's father "lett fall his pretence, and desired me to consider his Daughter, only as a patient, and to prescribe for her."[110] This remark poses the question of in what capacity had Musgrave been 'treating' Mary Cory before he succeeded in exposing her. Musgrave smugly concludes:

> Had the Girl not been discovered in Exeter, the father, who is a crafty fellow, designed (as I am informed) to have carryed his Daughter to London, and then she would (I suppose) have sett up for a Sight in the City...the people are so fond of this story That it is scarce safe, for a man, there, to express his Disbeleif of it.[111]

While I am not suggesting that all of the cases of early modern female inedia which were exposed as fraudulent, like Eva Vliegen and Mary Cory, were victims of a misogynistic conspiracy, I do want to argue that fasting women were forced to surrender their bodies to a range of invasive and threatening procedures which are difficult to justify as either objective or scientific. Although Musgrave follows the culturally-sanctioned practice of putting Cory's body under

scrutiny, he has already decided that she is duplicitous. His authority and the practices of interrogating the 'secrets' of the female body therefore become highly suspect.

Mary Cory represents both the feminized Nature in the Baconian scientific programme, to be subdued and tamed by the masculinist, sceptical mind, and the embodiment of a capricious and treacherous femininity. As a 'patient,' she occupies a space midway between these two figures. The world's gaze is easily seduced by feminine wiles: only the incorruptible gaze of the male scientist can divulge woman's monstrous duplicity. Musgrave's construction of Mary Cory as a seductress of the world is an antecedent to the nineteenth-century alienist's representation of the hysteric as an actress. As Mark Micale has commented: "The wildly shifting physical symptomology of [hysteria] was thought by many observers to mirror the irrational, capricious, and unpredictable nature of Woman. The exaggerated emotionality of the hysterical female was viewed as a pathological intensification of natural feminine sensibility itself...Throughout much of medical history, hysteria has represented, quite literally, an *embodiment* of female nature in the eyes and minds of male observers."[112]

Although Mr. Cory is described as "crafty," his opportunism defers to the information gained from Musgrave's detective work. He exploits and perpetuates the media interest surrounding his daughter, but the potential consequences of his actions are secondary to the threat Mary constitutes. Musgrave argues that monitoring Cory so closely is justifiable because it has averted the risk of London's entire populace being exposed to the insidious, seductive power of the female body. The corollary to Micale's point about hysteria as a manifestation of hyperfemininity is the threat of

the uncontrolled, riotous female body escaping and contaminating the society outside the asylum's secure walls. The power of the provocative and alluring female body is arrested by science, which has developed the technology to contain feminine subversion.

The physicians who examined the bodies of women abstinents have not had their authority questioned, but have instead been seen as empowering women by making their inedia credible. However, in William Musgrave's account we find a complete lack of professional detachment and an objectification of the female body by scientific practice. The obsessive zeal with which Musgrave elects to replace the weak father, disabuse the ever-increasing members of the 'cult' surrounding Mary Cory and expose her deceit before she can infect the entire nation is a disturbing and radical shift from the supposedly impartial role of the physician in authenticating cases of female inedia.

William Musgrove's assumption that Mary Cory contrived elaborate pretences to elicit admiration and sympathy from spectators is similarly levelled at women who preached, prophesyed or alleged they were pregnant with the Second Coming of the Messiah during the English Revolution. But women's own experiences of visibility and notoriety, as opposed to gynophobic accounts of manipulative and deceitful women, suggest that being thrust into the public gaze was not necessarily instigated by the women themselves or even desired by them. It could even constitute a threat to women's social status or psychological health.

Invasion of the Body-Snatchers: Body Practices, Texts and Celebrity

When Moses Pitt began to research his book about the miraculous healings that occurred in St. Teath, Cornwall, while he was a young boy, he sought the help of relatives still living in the vicinity to interview surviving eyewitnesses, as Pitt himself had moved to London in the intervening years. The person he most wanted to interview was the healer herself, Ann Jeffries, who had allegedly received her powers from fairies who also kept her alive during a three-month term of imprisonment in Bodmin gaol. This was apparently an attempt to starve Jeffries to death as a way of permanently excising her from the public gaze.

Pitt's brother-in-law, Humphrey Martyn, visited the seventy-year-old Jeffries. He asked her if she remembered any of the events surrounding her contact with the mysterious fairies in 1645, when she was nineteen years old and a ward of the Pitt household. Moses Pitt reproduces their exchange in *An Account of One Ann Jeffries* (1696):

> *she would not own any thing of it as concerning the* Fairies, *neither of any of the Cures she then did. I endeavoured to perswade her she might receive some Benefit by it: She answered; That if her own Father were alive, she would not discover to him those things that did happen to her. I ask'd her the Reason why she would not do it: She reply'd, That if she should discover it to you, that you would make either Books or Ballads out of it: And she said, That she would not have her Name spread about the Country in Books or Ballads or such things, if she might have five hundred pounds for the doing of it: for she said, she had been questioned before Justices, and at the Sessions, and in Prison, and also before the Judges at the Assizes; and she doth*

believe, that if she should discover such things now, she should be questioned again for it.[113]

A pauper's daughter who was sent to live with the Pitt family, according to a Cornish practice whereby the poor children of the parish became wards of affluent households, in 1645 Ann Jeffries was knitting in the garden when six "Persons of a small Stature" climbed over the hedge and came towards her.[114] Such was Jeffries's terror, she fainted, was found by the Pitts and taken into the house. She became chronically ill and bed-ridden, still claiming to see the fairies. She recovered slowly, and had to teach herself to walk again, because the muscles had wasted. The Pitt family found that emotional upset made Jeffries worse, so they did not tell her when Mr. Pitt's mother died in 1646. She continued to have fits, and became very attached to the young Moses Pitt, insisting on seeing him every time she recovered from one of her fits.

Ann Jeffries was illiterate, but she began to take "Mighty Delight in Devotion," listening attentively to sermons and readings of the Bible, which she would repeat to the family.[115] The first cure occurred at harvest time. Mrs. Pitt's leg was seriously injured in a fall, and preparations were made to ride to a surgeon living eight miles distant in Bodmin. Jeffries asked to see the injury. Mrs. Pitt initially refused to show it to a "poor and silly creature...for she could do no good," but Jeffries persisted and, fearing to upset the girl and cause another fit, Mrs. Pitt relented.[116] Jeffries stroked the leg, and healed it. She explained that what the family interpreted as her 'illness' had in fact been due to the appearance of the fairies, who visited her in varying (but always even) numbers.

News of Jeffries's healing abilities spread throughout Cornwall and beyond. Pitt remarks how: "People of all Distempers, Sicknesses, Sores, and Ages, came not only so far off as the Land's End, but also from *London,* and were cured by her." Jeffries never accepted any money for healings, nor did she purchase any salves or medicines, although she always seemed to have them ready if patients required them. She stopped eating with the Pitt family and was "fed by these *Fairies* from that Harvest-time to the next *Christmas*-day."[117] She did, however, make an exception on Christmas day and eat some of the Pitt's roast beef.[118] On one occasion, Moses Pitt went to Jeffries's chamber and found her in the middle of eating some of the fairy food. She gave him a piece of bread, which struck him as "the most delicious Bread that ever I did eat either before or since."[119]

Eventually, Jeffries was investigated by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Visiting ministers attempted to persuade Jeffries to accept that the fairies were "evil spirits" and a Delusion of the Devil."[120] She was disturbed by their admonitions, and the Pitt family agreed with the ministers that Jeffries should ignore the fairies when they called her. Hearing the fairies's summons, she initially resisted but finally went upstairs to her chamber. Returning with a Bible in her hand, she described how the fairies had vehemently denied that they were of any occult provenance. To prove this, they quoted from John 4:1: *"Dearly Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits, whether they are of God."* The page in which this passage appeared had been turned down to mark its place. Moses Pitt reiterates the fact that Jeffries was illiterate.

John Tregeagle, a Justice of the Peace in Cornwall, issued a warrant for Jeffries's arrest. The fairies gave her advance warning

that her arrest was imminent, and assured her that she need not be afraid. She was taken to Bodmin gaol, with instructions given "that she should be kept without Victuals."[121] This rule was strictly adhered to, but despite the efforts to starve her, Jeffries inexplicably survived. The Pitt family were questioned on suspicion of smuggling food for Jeffries, which they denied. Judge Tregeagle, frustrated by Jeffries's refusal to conveniently die, took her out of Bodmin and kept her in his own house without food. In the end, she was released, but on the condition that she no longer lived in the Pitt home at St. Teath. Moses's father's sister, Mrs. Francis Tom, allowed Jeffries to live with her at her house near Padstow, where she continued to heal people. Subsequently, Jeffries went to live with her brother, and eventually married.[122]

Not surprisingly, Jeffries is anxious about what might happen if public interest in her life is revived. However, it is self-evident that her refusal to cooperate with Moses Pitt did not prevent the publication of the book in 1696. While Jeffries experiences Pitt's research as a form of textual harassment, ultimately she has no control over what is said or written about her. Despite being a participant in the media sensation surrounding the healings and miraculous inedia, Pitt is not particularly impressed by Jeffries's desire for anonymity and fears of reprisals if she speaks about the past. Nevertheless, it is clear that for Jeffries, celebrity is a profoundly disabling experience and one that she is still recovering from as a seventy-year-old woman. The intrusiveness of the text constitutes a repetition of the legal and theological interrogations she was subjected to. Both *assume* a compliant body, and are oblivious of the possibility that Jeffries might contest the objectification of her body.

The compliant body is a generic feature in accounts of female ecstasy such as James Fisher's *The Wise Virgin* (1664) and Henry Jesse's *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced By the Spirit of Grace* (1647). They represent female mysticism as a combination of paradoxical physical passivity with total acquiescence towards suffering. In Fisher's text, Martha Hatfield experiences a religious trance, where she fasts and exhorts her family to repentance. Repeatedly begged to eat something, Hatfield replied that God would not permit her to eat. Nor would she accept her family's efforts to make her more comfortable. "I would not have been without this affliction for any thing; this is a good affliction indeed," she insisted.[123]

Similarly, the subject of Jesse's book, Sarah Wight, suffered severe religious despair, which manifested itself in the form of acute episodes of temptation from the age of twelve and continued for four years. The severity and violence of these episodes increased: Wight attempted suicide on numerous occasions by banging her head on walls, trying to strangle herself and self-mutilation. In 1647, Wight fell into a deep trance which lasted for 75 days, during which time she consumed nothing, was deprived of her senses and lay prostrate bin a state of weakness and immobility. It is described by Jesse as "the time of love, when the exceeding riches of Grace was advanced."[124] Wight rejects all attempts to encourage her to eat with exasperation: "*Why doe you hinder my Communion with God?*" she demands of her well-intentioned mother.[125] To a maid offering food, she asserts: "*I cannot, I am full.*"[126] Wight claims that she lives through the power of God, consuming forms of sustenance which are invisible to the mortal eye. The trance is ended by God, for when Wight recovers and asks for some dinner, she described how: "shee had

this apprehension cast into her: *Thou hast fasted long; thou shalt fast no longer; it was but to make my power known to the sons of men; what I have done; and what I can do.*"[127]

The expressions of 'fullness' articulated by both Wight and Hatfield do not infer *self* sufficiency, but the sense of completion and integrity they experience in God. Before God afflicted their bodies, they were insufficient and inadequate, but during the affliction, they emphasize humility and the passive acceptance of suffering. The hagiographical style of Fisher and Jesse valorizes the experience of pain. It should be apparent that when we speak of a compliant body, we need to ask compliant to *whom*, or *what*? By accepting the privations inflicted upon them by God, Hatfield and Wight are defying their families and perhaps communities, resisting the attempts to define them as social bodies and bodies which consume. But the subversive power of the starving body is transformed into a redemptive discourse about God's providence in making use of feminine weakness. Jesse and Fisher emphasize that each girl is complete only in God, by herself she is (in Jesse's words) an "Empty Nothing Creature."[128]

The textual representation of inedia or bodily practices such as miraculous healing and ecstatic behaviour does not necessarily have a destructive effect upon female subjectivity. The late seventeenth-century cases of Mary Maillard and Lydia Hills, who had both suffered chronic lameness following a fall which spontaneously healed, led to the production of texts which simulated the legal proceedings in which the validity of the healings were debated. Whereas we saw that the texts on inedia frequently deny the fasting woman the ability to participate in the interpretation of her own body, the texts on healing actually seem to empower Hills and Maillard. By documenting

in detail all of the legal depositions which testify to the authenticity of the miracles, the texts recuperate the credibility of the female body. The voices of Hills and Maillard are enabled, rather than excised, by those of various professional and notable individuals who confer legitimacy onto them.[129]

However, as I have argued, the historiography of early modern inedia frequently does not address itself to the dimension of gendered subjectivity, nor to implicating inedia as a cultural practice which can enable that subjectivity. While it is the case that many of the accounts of women's bodies exist in mediated texts, this does not mean that women never speak of their experiences and therefore that these experiences are irrecoverable. As readers, we need to be alert to women's voices and, in recuperating them, accord them the significance and centrality which they are often (but not always) denied in contemporary texts.

Inedia and other bodily phenomena are (re)constituted by discourses of religion, science, politics and popular culture. The perverse female body was variously employed as a religious sign or as an object lesson in scientific rationalism. But the reductive effect of the conclusions which male observers arrive at are in a sense evasions of the significance which the female body held. Inedia excited debate across social strata; people travelled across the country to visit the fasting girl in her humble village; authors wrote about her. The Royal Society, which was invited to participate in the investigations of Martha Taylor and Jane Taunton, apparently declined in each case. But a lack of interest belies the actual effects female inedia had upon seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century culture. Thomas Hobbes, the philosopher and political theorist, heard about Taylor's case and wrote about her in a letter,

dated October 20th, 1668. Part of it reads:

> To know the certainty there be many things necessary which cannot honestly be pryed into by a man...I think it were somewhat inhumane to examine these things too nearly, when it so little concerneth the commonwealth: nor do I know of any law that authoriseth a justice of peace, or other subject, to restrain the liberty of a sick person so far as were needful for a discovery of this nature. The examining whether such a thing as this be a miracle belongs I think to the Church.[130]

It is possible to read Hobbes's judgement as a timely antidote to the sensationalism which erupted around Taylor's case and others like it. Taylor, he avers, should not be subjected to such intense scrutiny and intrusion, not least because she is "sick." By arguing that the surveillance of a fasting girl is unethical, because it constitutes a violation of "liberty," Hobbes, uniquely amongst his contemporaries, conceived of Taylor as a *subject* and not merely as subjugated body. But Hobbes's rational view that there is no legal precedent for the authorities to become involved in cases of inedia was certainly not shared by individuals such as John Tregeagle in Cornwall. The crucial phrase, I think, is Hobbes's insistence that Taylor' s inedia "little concerneth the commonwealth." The appropriate place to discuss the existence of miraculous activity is within the church. Otherwise, Taylor is essentially irrelevant.

Although Hobbes ostensibly signals his absence from the inedia debate, this is an illusion. His own position is ambiguous: does he dismiss Taylor as too trivial a subject for his contemplative faculties? Or is he attempting to recover her from the intrusiveness

of the public gaze? He may be implicitly criticising those rational men who used the 'irrational' female body to define their own intellectual identities. By paring the signifying excess of Taylor's fasting body, Hobbes perhaps hoped to encourage others to do the same.

In the final chapter, I will consider 'false' women prophets, female histrionicism in conversion experiences, and gynophobia. I will read accounts of false prophecy and infanticide as illustrative of unregulated female power: what women do in the absence of men. The false prophetess is represented as sexually unlight and unchaste in antisectarian literature. I will consider how feminine creativity and potency is demonized by gynophobia, suggesting how writers like Eleanor Davies and Elizabeth Cary attempt to recuperate the figure of the mother and the totality of female experience.

I will also be suggesting that the domestic space in which women afflicted by religious despair or melancholy behaved subversively was a legitimate space for female *non*compliance, because it was a phase preceding the containment of the woman within the nonconformist household by the minister as surrogate father. I will compare the treatment of nineteenth-century hysterics with early modern cases like Joan Drake and Sarah Wight. I will compare women's experiences of religious melancholy with textual accounts of irreligious behaviour such as blasphemy and atheism, and assess why women are less likely to be figured as athiests.

Notes

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15 Ibid, p. 191.

16 Durston, 'For the Better Humiliation of the People,' p. 130.

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18 Ibid, p. 134.

19 Bownde, *Holy Exercise*, pp. 2-3.

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23 Ibid, IV, p. 372.

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28 Ibid, f 37r.

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71 Vincenzo diNicola remarks that: "I propose that what is definitive about self-starvation is the changing socio-cultural blueprint: it determines whether fasting will be construed in religious terms as 'holy anorexia,' in medical terms as 'chlorosis,' in psychiatric terms as 'anorexia nervosa,' or in political terms such as 'hunger strike'. In this view, anorexia nervosa is a chameleon with protean clinical manifestations changing with the times, what we might call *anorexia multiforme,*" 'Anorexia Multiforme: Self-starvation in Historical and Cultural Context. Part I: Self-Starvation as a Historical Chameleon,' *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review* 27 (1990), 165-196, (p. 177).

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73 On this point, see Rupert A. Hall, 'English Medicine in the Royal Society's Correspondence, 1660-1667,' in *Science and Society. Historical Essays on the Relations of Science, Technology and Medicine*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 434, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1994), 111-125. Subsequent to my finding the letter about Jane Taunton in the B.L. Additional manuscript 4432, I discovered that Henry Oldenburg's letters have been edited by A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall as *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, 13 volumes, (Madison, Milwaukee & London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965-1986). Nathaniel Fairfax's letter is reproduced in full in volume VI, pp. 67-71. The Halls have transcribed 'Naunton' whereas I believe it to be 'Taunton,' having consulted the manuscript on a number of occasions. My decision to use the extract concerning Jane Taunton's self-starvation in the Royal

Society's letter books rather than the original private letter is based on my interest in the transmission and circulation of knowledge about inedia within cultural institutions. One of the issues I consider is the nature of the Royal Society's involvement in the inedia debates, which is contingent upon its public image and reputation.

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100 Reynolds, *A Discourse upon Prodigious Abstinence*, p. 4.

101 Ibid, p. 6.

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103 Ibid, p. 21.

104 Ibid, p. 30.

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113 Moses Pitt, *An Account of One Ann Jeffries, Now Living in the*

County of Cornwall, who was fed for six Months by a small sort of Airy People call'd Fairies (London, 1696), p. 9.

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116 Ibid, p. 14.

117 Ibid, p. 16.

118 Ibid, p. 17.

119 Ibid, p. 18.

120 Ibid, p. 19.

121 Ibid, p. 20.

122 Ibid, pp. 21-22.

123 James Fisher, *The Wise Virgin; or, a Wonderfull Narration of the Various dispensations of God towards a Childe of eleven* (London, 1664), p. 10.

124 Henry Jesse, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced by the Spirit of Grace, in an Empty Nothing Creature, viz. Mts. Sarah Wight* (London, 1647), p. 15.

125 Ibid, pp. 18-19.

126 Ibid, p. 26.

127 Ibid, p. 139.

128 Jesse, *Exceeding Riches*, cover page.

129 See E.H., *A Plain and True Relation of a Very Extraordinary Cure of Mariane Maillard. In a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1693); *A Relation of the Miraculous Cure of Mrs. Lydia Hills Of A Lameness of Eighteen Years continuance, and extraordinary* Pains *attending it, on Saturday the 17th of November 1694. With her Deposition of the Same before the Right Honourable Sir* Thomas Lane, *Lord Major of the City of London* (London, 1695); *A True Relation of the Wonderful Cure of Mary Maillard, (Lame almost ever since she was Born) On Sunday the 26th of*

Nov. 1693. With the Affadavits and Certificates of the Girl, and several other Credible and Worthy Persons, who knew her both before and since her being Cured. To which is added, A Letter from Dr. Welwood to the Right Honourable the Lady Mayoress, upon that Subject (London, 1694).

130 Quoted in J.A. Silverman, 'Anorexia Nervosa,' p. 849.

Chapter Five:

Imag(in)ing The Monstrous:

Representing the Feminine in Seventeenth-Century Anti-Sectarian Literature

Maternity and the Religious Self in Seventeenth-Century England

In the introduction to their anthology *Kissing The Rod,* Germaine Greer *et al.* argue that poems written by mothers about child bereavement counter the assumption that the high infant mortality rate during the early modern period 'familiarized' parents to the death of their children to the extent that their experience of emotional and psychological trauma was reduced. The editors point out that this argument "would have seemed curious, to say the least, to women who spent all their adult lives pregnant and had no living child."[1] One of the women whose poems are featured in this anthology is Mary Carey, who kept a notebook in which she recorded her own meditations and poems. Some of them have been reproduced in a modern edition, published in 1918. Carey was married twice; five of her children died. In 1647 she wrote *My Abortive Birth* after one of her children was stillborn. She questions the death of her child, but abides by the judgement of God, which is a source of solace rather than a focus for recrimination. Carey's husband is written out of the text. Men as well as women wrote privately in letters and diaries about the death of a child; this is not to deny that he grieved, but rather to observe how, Mary Carey emphasizes that it is *her* body that God has punished. The maternal body is thus the locus of grief and suffering.

As was the case with Elizabeth Joceline, author of *The Mother's Legacy* (1684), anxieties about childbirth inspired Carey to write *A Dialogue Betwixt the Soul and the Body* on February 11th, 1649. In this dialogue, Carey draws on her own life experiences to create the personification of the Body, portraying a woman who is tormented by the deaths of her children and whose current pregnancy is close to

term. The Body asks:

> Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Besides, I am now near the time of my travail, and am very weak, faint, sickly, fearful, pained, apprehending much sufferings before me, if not death itself, the king of terrors.[2]

Carey's appropriation of the dialogue between the soul and the body transforms the concepts of dualism and antagonism which were present in the medieval origins of the debate, instead representing the dialogue as one in which the Body learns to imitate the Soul and is assured that she will unite with her 'sister,' the Soul, on the day of judgement. The Soul narrates her progress from in-corporeality to a state of supercorporeal spirituality. Her position in relation to that of the Body is not one of superiority, but is actually informed by the experience of bodiliness. Carey implicitly suggests that what the Body desires is inertia (a not unreasonable wish, given the 'work' of reproduction to which fertile women were relegated until they reached the menopause). The Body, aware that as the redundant remnant of physicality, she will be left to rot in the grave, wonders whether she can hope to be left in peace.[3] The Soul 'answers' by giving an account of her own ascent into God's grace.

The Soul describes how, at the age of eighteen, she suffered an affliction from God, at a time when she was "taking my fill of worldly contentments, and restrained my heart from nothing it fancied to follow."[4] Despite her predeliction for sensuality and materialism, the Soul was miserable and longed to amend her frivolous ways. But she was ignorant as to what resolutions she should make. The Soul decided

to embark upon a hermetic existence: "I sequestered myself from all my former company and sinful delights, and my spirit was very restless and full of enquiry."[5] She became convinced that she was a reprobate beyond any hope of salvation, and began to weaken under the taunts of Satan, who encouraged her to regard God as her enemy. She was in despair, believing that God's "wrath and hell my portion for Eternity."[6]

The Body asked if the Soul had been comforted by listening to sermons and reading scripture. She is eager to learn how long the Soul continued in this state of despair, and how she recovered. The Soul replies that it was almost a year before she experienced any improvement. She asserts that: "all GOD's attributes were then terrors."[7] The Soul describes how God eventually showed mercy and grace to her, giving her comfort and reassurance to trust in him. If God had not chosen to reveal his grace to the Soul, she asserts that she would not have been saved. She emphasizes the inadequacy of language to articulate God's love for sinners: "the tongue of man and angel cannot express it" as she puts it.[8] The Soul exhorts the value of what she calls "prayer mercies," explaining how God bestows more than she could ask for or even deserves.[9] She reveals how her "prayer-hearing God" has strengthened her during adverse life experiences, such as the death of her children, or Satan's attempts to tempt her back into sin.[10] The Body learns to be content with what God has provided her, and to join with the Soul in praising him. Union rather than division is envisaged: the Soul will ascend to Heaven, but the Body will be revived when Christ appears on earth to gather the godly together, and join with the Soul in praising his name.[11]

Carey's *Dialogue* attempts to transform the experience of suffering into one of divine love. Although the text imagines a future where the

body is transcended, it is not an exercise in debasing the body, which raises the issue of whether Carey herself aspires to the supercorporeality of the soul or whether she defines herself in terms of her fertility and desires to bear more children in spite of the ones she has lost. The Body simultaneously articulates the pleasure and pain of maternity. Motherhood is a form of enduring love analogous to the punitive and incomprehensible love of God. Whether maternal or divine, love both 'endures' and is something to be 'endured.' Carey skilfully negotiates the ambivalence of love, combining the pain of memory and of spiritual affliction with the inexpressible intensity of emotion a mother feels for her infant and the Soul's experience of free grace. But as a lesson in perceiving her body as a site of divine intervention rather than incomprehensible punishment, Carey's autodidactic text cannot erase the experience of maternal trauma which lies at its centre.

Private texts like the *Note Book* perform a significant function in the creation and maintenance of a gendered religious self, specifically representing how the self 'processes' adverse life experiences and assimilates them into its perceived relationship with God. As a window onto Carey's interiority, the text reveals the extent to which maternity dominates her self-image. The privatization of maternity within the diary is suggestive with regards to the perception of motherhood in the public space. In this respect, Carey's exclusion of her husband's experience of bereavement from her text appears to be significant. Do women writers represent maternal experience in public as well as private texts?

Both the high child mortality rate and the percentage of women who died during childbirth in early modern England are obviously significant factors in the perception and experience of maternity,

but it is important to note the fact that women's experience of maternal loss was multiple. In the case of Eleanor Davies, the aristocratic prophetess, we can identify various events where maternal experience is an important determinant in the development of her career as a prophet. The nineteen-year-old Eleanor Audeley's marriage to Sir John Davies, a much older man, in 1609 was regarded as a socially advantageous match. He was an ambitious solicitor, who was appointed the King's Solicitor for Ireland in 1603, and three years later was promoted to Attorney at the age of thirty-six. Sir John Davies believed that Eleanor's aristocratic connections would enhance his career prospects and bring economic benefits too. Eleanor gave birth to a daughter, Lucy, in 1613. But the Davies failed to produce a male heir who survived beyond childhood. Richard died in infancy and Jack, who probably suffered from a condition similar to autism, drowned in Ireland during Sir John's tenure as Attorney. The importance of producing a male heir was instilled in upper-class women. If a marriage remained childless, it was seen as the wife's 'fault.'[12] In 1623, Lucy's marriage to Ferdinando, son of Henry Hastings, the fifth Earl of Huntingdon, was arranged. At that time Lucy was aged just ten, and her prospective husband was not much older, so both families chose to follow the common practice of having them live at home for several more years.

Lucy's marriage was the beginning of years of acrimonious dispute between the Hastings and the Davies. Eleanor herself had numerous reasons other than the loss of her daughter (with whom she shared an exceptionally close relationship) for disliking the Hastings and in particular the Countess of Huntingdon (Ferdinand's mother). From the outset, it was clear that the marriage would be more beneficial to the impoverished but genteel Hastings, who had no scruples about using

their daughter-in-law's legal status to further their economic interests. Lucy finally left home (Englefield in Berkshire) to move in with the Hastings in April 1625.

It might be argued that 'separation anxiety' was instrumental in Eleanor Davies's pre-prophetic phase, during which she protected the dumb magician George Carr and neglected managing the household in order to intensively study the Old Testament book of Daniel. Three months after Lucy's departure, "a Voice from Heaven" manifested itself to Davies at home in Englefield and proclaimed her as "the meek Virgin."[13] However, the term 'separation anxiety' privileges psychological over cultural factors, implicating weak emotional boundaries and a lack of autonomy between mother and daughter in precipitating a crisis in Eleanor Davies. In the same way as the 'anorexogenic' family was perceived to be the catalyst for the onset of an eating disorder (which we discussed in the previous chapter), such an interpretation regards the intimacy between Eleanor Davies and Lucy as pathological. Instead of arguing that a combination of biological determinism and psychopathology were the catalysts for a pre-prophetic state in which Davies created an attachment with George Carr, figuring him as a surrogate child, we need to contextualize Davies's behaviour within seventeenth-century cultural paradigms of maternity. Specifically, we need to relate the ambivalence surrounding the relationship between prophecy and sexuality to notions of female authorship and generative potency. Davies's appropriation of the maternal role in her writing is perhaps an attempt to compensate for what she perceived as the devaluing of her maternal skills.

Mirror Images: Anatomy, Eidectic Memory and The Maternal Body

An analogy can be identified between Mary Carey's mourning and the induction into prophecy of Eleanor Davies. Carey, whose desire to transcend corporeality is projected into a post-menopausal future, seems to express a longing to become pregnant again. But since she effaces her husband from the text, she could be said to identify with the Virgin Mary. In displacing the husband, Carey's text seeks the paternity of God. Eleanor Davies's status as a prophet is conferred with an instruction to follow the example of the Virgin's "meekness." While the Virgin Mary was an object of veneration for Catholics, who regarded her as a figure who would intercede on their behalf to God, attitudes to the Virgin within protestant England were characterized by ambivalence. Although the theological binarism of Eve and Mary persisted, in which the Virgin constituted an emblem of exemplary female piety and humility, the nature of women's identification with her could potentially be characterized as perversion rather than praiseworthy emulation. The post-Reformation prohibition of Marian cults and the worship of idols constituted an assault upon the maternal image as a legitimate object of pious veneration.

In antisectarian tracts like *Gangraena* (1646) and *The Ranter's Monster* (1652) the role of the Virgin is appropriated by deluded and subversive women. The underlying gynophobia of these texts is based upon a conviction that women are innately incapable of achieving the Virgin's spiritual perfection. In an age where miracles were past, for a woman to claim parity with the Virgin is immediately suspect, interpreted not as an expression of (sexual/spiritual) purity but the reverse. When women like Mary Adams claimed to be pregnant with the Second Coming, they were seen as grotesque experiments in asexual generation, which if successful would make masculine potency

redundant. Women who made putatively false allegations of 'Virgin births' and prophetic ability were regarded as sexually unchaste. For their part in conspiracies of organized deception, involving both men and women who each claimed to possess divine powers, women like Anne Wells and Mary Gadbury are perceived as more culpable, both in terms of sexual deviance and irreligious behaviour.

The subversiveness of women's appropriation of the Virgin is less to do with the implausibility of the miraculous or providential in early modern England, but is more a reaction to the implicit erasure of the father. In *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia* (1987), Julia Kristeva discusses the case of Isabel, a depressive patient, who chose to become pregnant while she was depressed. Isabel was impatient with both of the men in her life: her husband disappointed her and her lover was "childish." Kristeva describes Isabel's reasons for deciding to become pregnant: "she wanted to have her child 'for herself.' Knowing who fathered it mattered little to her. 'I want the child, not the father,' the 'virgin mother' reflected."[14] Isabel rejects both the significance of the father and her prescribed status as a commodity, a womb in the service of patriarchy. Instead, it is the father himself who becomes the disposable commodity. The child is not his heir, but a surrogate love object to Isabel, to whom (all?) men are emotionally inadequate. The Virgin, ostensibly the signifier of ultimate sexual purity, might also represent the potential for female generation in which the male seed becomes redundant. The 'crimes' of female sexuality and religiosity which will be considered in the first part of this chapter--monstrous progeny, infanticide, adultery and conspiracies of false prophecy--constitute a threat to patrilineal property inheritance. They are demonstrations of what happens when female sexuality is not (or is no

longer) in the service of patriarchy.

Representations of femininity in antisectarian tracts are products of early modern sexual knowledge, derived from theology, anatomy and philosophy. Since antiquity, scientific debate had vacillated between the Galenic two-seed theory of human generation and Aristotle's contention that the male seed was prime and that the women functioned merely as a receptacle. In the seventeenth-century pseudo-Aristotelian text *The Experienc'd Midwife*, the author asserted: "He is the agent, she the patient or weaker vessel, that she might be subject to the office of the Man."[15] Sexual difference was founded upon a binary humoral relationship: woman was cold and wet, man hot and dry. The 'nobility' of the male seed contrasted with the theory of menotoxicity. Whereas semen was a highly purified form of blood, the menses were excreted from the body as effluent. Writing in the eleventh century, the medical translator Constantine Africanus wrote that semen is "a warm, runny spirit which...creates the generative power of the man from whom it comes."[16] In *On the Generation of Animals*, Aristotle regarded the menses as the "evacuation" of pathological substances but argued that ejaculation was detrimental to the male body. The loss of semen, he wrote, "is just as exhausting as the loss of pure healthy blood."[17] The uterus was figured as the devourer of male semen and, metonymically, of masculine creativity and potency.

The paradigms of feminine sexuality which circulated in seventeenth-century cultural discourses amalgamated the two theories: the Aristotelean notion of woman as inverted (and therefore imperfect) man, and the Galenic 'two-seed' theory which conferred some degree of generative potency onto women. In *The Sicke Womans Private Looking-Glasse* (1636), John Sadler considers the

causes of monstrous births:

> The agent, or wombe, may be in fault three ways. First, in the formative facultive, which may be too strong, or too weake, by which is produced a depraved figure. Secondly, in the instrument or place of conception, the evill conformation or disposition whereof, will cause a monstrous birth. Thirdly in the imaginative power at the time of conception, which is of such force that it stamps the character of the thing imagined upon the child: so that the children of an adultresse may be like unto her own husband though begotten by another man; which is caused through the force of the imagination which the woman hath of her owne husband in the act of coition.

Prime among the possible causes of monstrous births is the female imagination, which can influence the development of the foetus both during conception and afterwards.[18] An unpredictable variable in the physiological process of reproduction, the female imagination is perverse, able to corrupt the purity of the male seed as Aristotle envisaged it. In Sadler's text, a 'monstrous' birth is not necessarily a visually grotesque one. It implicitly suggests that *any* birth is potentially monstrous, because women's bodies are inherently irresponsible and unreliable. As a reproductive, excretive and seductive body, the woman has manifold opportunities to project her physical morbidity onto others. Although the mother (like the hysteric) could be seen as the 'victim' of her imagination, the implication that she could consciously manipulate it coupled with the risk of exposure to 'innocent' men and children meant that she was not regarded as a passive repository of toxicity. Because of

its intimacy with the female body, the foetus is at greatest risk. Proximity with the maternal body is thus associated with harm rather than nurturance. Sadler notes that women frequently obtain abortifacient medicines to treat irregular menstruation, oblivious of the fact that they are pregnant. "Ignorance," he writes, "makes women murderers to the fruit of their owne bodies."[19] Although Sadler suggests that women lack knowledge about their own bodies, he treats both monstrous births and abortion as the mother's 'fault.' Rather than being seen as 'naturally' or 'innately' maternal, the emphasis upon women's irresponsibility suggests that they occupy an infantilised position.

In Sadler's text, emphasis has shifted from the womb as the primary site of feminine pathology to the imagination. Although the uterus was regarded as a mobile organ, its destructiveness was essentially limited to its female host. However unruly the behaviour of the hysteric, it was interpreted as symptomatic of the assault upon the body by the voracious and animalistic womb. The imagination, however, is not affected by physical constraints and can be externalized beyond the body. Unlike the body, which is exposed and catalogued in the process of dissection, the imagination evades scientific scrutiny. It leaves no evidential trace on the body. It is thus even harder to regulate than the womb, which was at least amenable to some degree of medical intervention: physicians could dissuade it from damaging an area of the body with the topical application of noxious or pleasant scents.

The body of knowledge which Sadler reconstitutes is both anatomical and inferred. He draws on cultural mythology to compensate for the inadequacy of anatomical knowledge in explaining the role of the imagination in conception and foetal development.

What is problematic about imagination for the mapping of the female body demonstrates the fact that the meaning of the body is always deferred. Interiority cannot be directly experienced but only represented.

Sadler's text is preoccupied with 'seeing.' He purports to have written a gynecological manual packaged specifically for women. He remarks that he has "stooped to [women's] capacities" in avoiding the use of rhetorical language.[20] The ostensible function of the text is to enable the woman reader to understand her own physicality. But the image in the 'looking-glasse' is not an unmediated body: Sadler is compelling women towards a particular 'reading' of their interiority.

The theory of maternal imagination emphasized women's sensitivity to images. Sadler cites the case of a gentlewoman in Suffolk, whose face was accidentally splashed with blood by her butcher "whereupon she said, that her childe would have some blemish on the face, and at the birth it was found marked with a red spot."[21] In possession of both an eidectic memory and an ocular fixation, the mother is simultaneously fascinated by images and able to reproduce them. As a form of mimetic activity, it could be argued that the mother's ability to engender images is analogous to technologies of art and creativity. But art is simultaneously being imagined as a practice which is regulated by natural laws and the prerogative of the rational, ethical male. Within this scheme, what the mother produces is a simulacrum. Her imitation of art is imperfect, because it attempts to subvert the 'natural' order.

Sadler's definition of a monstrous birth suggests a relationship between the means of production and the finished product. The thing which is produced retains the trace of its production. As a visual

sign of absence (both natural laws and the paternal role have been erased), the imperfect child of the maternal imagination betrays its 'monstrous' origins. Autonomous maternal generation is represented as chaotic and irrational, uninformed by utilitarian or functional imperatives. Unlike the artist, whose selection of appropriate images is characterized by cerebral discernment, the mother merely 'copies' images.

Analogous to the xerographic powers of the mother are twentieth-century anxieties about the implications of genetic cloning, which are specifically concerned with the the notion that scientific technology is 'usurping' the 'natural' reproductive process. A consequence of this form of genetic experimentation is that clones are unable to reproduce. It is interesting that the first genetically engineered animal is a sheep named 'Dolly,' a female whose artificial conception renders her incapable of mothering. Early modern accounts of maternal influence articulate similar fears about 'interference' in generation, which may result in flawed progeny. As the example of the scarred child shows, the mother transposes and splices together images to create hybrids or chimeras: progeny out of place because their fathers have been *displaced* by maternal power. By exposing the covert operation of the maternal imagination, Sadler attempts to restore a binary relationship where the masculine position is that of author and artist, and the feminine that of reader, her sensibilities pliant to the strictures of paternal regulation.

One of Sadler's strategies of enforcing the submissiveness of the female reader is to use anatomy as a literary trope. Early modern illustrations of the anatomized female body represented it as a willing participant. Gazing into Sadler's mirror, the woman reader is encouraged to acquiesce in the depiction of her own bodily

irresponsibility. But the image of the dissected body as 'open,' inviting the gaze, is precisely an inscription of the body as feminized *by* that gaze. The female body is mastered through representation. It is interesting how frequently this 'mirror metaphor' is invoked in seventeenth-century discussions of female criminality.

A Pittilesse Mother (1616) is an account of Margaret Vincent, who murdered her two children after she became a Catholic recusant. The anonymous author remarks that Vincent's "liues ouerthrow may well serue for a clear looking Glasse to see a womans weaknes in, how soone and apt she is wonne into wickednes."[22] As a strategy, this metaphor denies the 'I' of the female subject, substituting the 'eye' of the 'enlightened' woman who has internalized her bodily duplicity, which the 'eye/I' of the male author/anatomist has penetrated and divulged.

Although the anatomical image signifies coherent and unequivocal meaning, the act of dissection itself is a source of anxiety. In penetrating the chaotic interiority of women, the anatomist exposed himself to a potentially infectious morbidity. Jonathan Sawday has noted that the cadavers which were brought to the anatomy theatres of the Renaissance were regarded as potential second Adams and Eves. But as he points out, "To be an Eve...was very different from being an Adam within the patriarchal structure of early-modern culture." To dissect Eve was to confront her sin and produce sexual knowledge which could contain it. The threat that female rebellion would proliferate meant that the "anatomical knowledge of Eve...was perhaps a *more* important project than knowledge of Adam who was, after all, no more than the 'victim' of her unruly desires."[23]

The Sicke Womans Private Looking-Glasse, which demonstrates

various ways of seeing/knowing female sexuality, constitutes a panoptic instrument for the cultural regulation of women's reproductive bodies. Although the criminal female imagination cannot be physically located, its effects are nevertheless discernible: adulterous women, by virtue of being 'exposed' in the text, do not escape detection.

The significance of Sadler's insistence that women need to be 'educated' out of their ignorance about their bodies is the gesture towards an anxiety about women's competence as mothers. In their 'natural' state (in other words, without masculinist intervention), women are intrinsically unmaternal. If motherhood is not regarded as normative for women, does that therefore devalue the status of maternity within early modern culture? It could of course be argued that the reverse argument--biological determinism--which asserts that motherhood is women's 'destiny,' is equally unhelpful to women as Sadler's assertions about their deficiencies as mothers.

However, feminists' discomfort with the notion of motherhood as a putatively 'natural' category, may lead them to associate the maternal with powerlessness and emotional and material dissatisfaction. But we should regard patriarchal readings of the maternal body as acknowledging the potential subversive power of that body. Sadler's dismissal of women's traditional knowledge about their bodies as not only inaccurate but abusive towards unborn children insists on the authority of scientific practices. Sadler follows the medieval professionalization of medicine which wrested gynecological knowledge away from midwives and lay women and made it the prerogative of university-trained medical practitioners. Feminists may collude in the explicit somatophobia of his text by reading the maternal body as a site of disempowerment and

vulnerability.

Although, as Patricia Crawford points out, seventeenth-century cultural was "strongly pro-natalist," this was qualified by the legal and ideological apparatus designed to restrict female sexuality to within marriage and to ensure the marital subjection of the wife.[24] As we have seen, women were measured according to their ability to fulfil the criteria for the 'good' mother. They were implicated if they were unable to produce a male heir or gave birth to a deformed child. When Parliament introduced the death penalty for adultery in 1650, the wording of the bill stipulated that this heinous crime could only be committed by a woman. If convicted, a married man was found guilty of the lesser crime of fornication, which did not carry the death penalty. That the courts very rarely imposed execution on a woman convicted of adultery is in a sense irrelevant: the intention was to make every woman aware of the serious consequences of her sexual transgression. The risk of pregnancy meant that it was harder for women to conceal sexual relations outside marriage. Not only were women more likely to be exposed and charged with sexual deviancy, they were also liable to more punitive forms of punishment.

To the extent that seventeenth-century culture promoted maternity, it did so within proscribed limits. The 'good' mother constituted an obedient and fertile body which had internalized its own lack. The textual mirror, as a point of convergence between the feminized interior and the masculinist public space, spoke to male as well as female readers. Comparing maternal imitation with masculinist artistic practice served to emphasize the inferior quality of women's 'creations.' Sadler conceded that women could play an influential role in foetal development, but it was better if

they did not.

Seventeenth-century thought on maternal generation was influenced by the Renaissance alchemist Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim's theory of spiritual generation. Theophrastus, more commonly known as Paracelsus, was born at about 1493 and died in 1541. Alchemists believed that humans were capable of spiritual as well as biological generation. According to Paracelsus, the 'aquastric fissure' was the site on the body responsible for spiritual generation. On man, the fissure was located on the forehead, while a woman's was at the rear of her head. In men, the fissure enabled telepathic creation and the ability to converse with deities, while in women, it constituted a breach of bodily and moral integrity, exposing them to demonic possession. Paracelsus argued that witchcraft was essentially a perversion of creativity. Witches lacked the generative potency of semen, so they seduced men in order to steal their seed. Witches used semen to develop evil creations, such as plague. As Nancy Tuana points out, Paracelsus's theory reiterates the notion that only the male is "the true parent." The mother's function is to nourish the male seed she has been impregnated with.[25] The 'good' mother accepts the constraints of her role; the woman who desires creative power is by definition a witch.

Within the patriarchal scheme, maternity is a position of subjection, rather than an enabler of nascent subjectivity. My intention in this chapter is to do two things: to examine the representation of monstrous births, fraudulent conspiracies involving claims of prophetic activity and infanticide, and to ask whether texts by early modern women constitute maternal narratives. Like the monstrous mother, the florid and emotional performances of the demoniac daughter in accounts of conversion experiences are

paradigmatic of female violence as it is socially constructed. The negligence and irresponsibility associated with motherhood effectively means that mother and daughter occupy the same space. The mother occupies an infantilised position in cultural discourse. We have already seen how editorial imperatives compel the erasure of the woman prophet's gendered subjectivity, whereas when women write about their own prophetic experiences, they write from a gendered position. What are the implications of simultaneously writing as a prophet and as a mother? My argument is that 'tabloid' accounts of female violence evince the fact that motherhood is a problematic category. Since these texts do not represent filicide and sexual transgression as rare aberrations but as an invariable threat suggests that such incidents are instrumental in identifying what constitutes 'appropriate' maternal behaviour and how it should be regulated.

A significant factor in the aetiology of maternal violence is religious conversion, although this did not necessarily mean to sectarian groups. Anabaptism in particular was often implicated as 'targetting' women, but in some of the accounts, the woman's recusancy is a motivational factor in her crime. The relationship between the sect or Roman Catholic church and the woman as mother as represented in popular print raises some interesting points. What happens to the maternal body when it comes into contact with the sect? Are women biologically susceptible to sects as they allegedly were vulnerable to witchcraft and demonic possession? Were murderous mothers victims or perpetrators? Were women passively assimilated (brainwashed) into sects or was their membership an act of defiance or opposition? By attending to the language which early modern print culture uses to speak about maternal transgression, we can

interrogate the ideological foundations upon which the social construction of motherhood is based.

The proliferation of monstrous *topoi* from gynecology to androcentric manuals of household management suggests how a woman's subversion of gender role expectations was construed as a source of visceral disturbance. In *A Godly Form of Hovseholde Gouernement* (1598), eminent nonconformist ministers Robert Cleaver and John Dod insist that: "a mankinde woman is a monster: that is, halfe a woman, and halfe a man."[26] A female 'monster,' then, is a woman who usurps masculine space. But, critically, she does more than that: she *confuses* the distinction between (masculine) public and (female) private space. Her participation in sectarian activities is likely to be covert and her husband is probably unaware of her membership. Her status as a religious convert compromises her maternal role, disrupting the supposed inviolacy of the domestic space, in which the mother represents reassurance and nurture. Economic and business interests makes the father's absence from the household inevitable, leaving his children entirely dependent on their mother. Maternal violence occurs under the pretext of normal mothering and within domestic space: which is what makes it so insidious and difficult to prevent.

The idea that the monstrous mother appropriates masculine practices is also suggestive with regard to authorship. The mother-as-author is another manifestation of the 'monstrous.' Reading reports of women who claim to be pregnant with the Second Coming and who produce deformed progeny, we become aware of contemporary anxieties about the generation of a specific chimera: the splicing of female sexuality with textuality in the public space. This reinforces the stereotype of the religious sect as a perversion of

patriarchal society which encourages polygamy and other 'deviant' sexual practices. Texts produced by women could be interpreted as agents of a specifically sexual contagion. Imperfect and flawed they might be, but, like the plagues Paracelsus envisaged, innocuous they were emphatically not. Accounts of maternal violence, sexual deviance and deception can therefore be seen as attempts to pre-empt the effects of women's writing and contain what was regarded as a toxic eroticism. The sub-text to these narratives is the devastating consequences which result when women become authors of their own bodies, experiences and texts.

"Lay[ing] open Mens greatest Mistakes": Interpreting Maternal Violence in Seventeenth-Century England

A significant feature of filicide narratives is their iconography, which is graphic to the point of exploitation. The title page of *Bloody Newes from Dover* (1646) shows Mary Champion presenting her horrified husband with the head of their seven-week old child "to baptize." The naked body, blood spilling out of its neck, lies sprawled against the wall. The features on the child's face are clearly visible. The murder weapon, a large knife, lies discarded on the floor. The explicit identification of the husband as a presbyterian and Mary Champion as an Anabaptist reiterates the moral obscenity of this act. The husband has thrown his arms up into the air, while Champion, in a parody of subjection, gives him the child's head, while she points to the headless body on the floor.[27] Champion is the affectless mother, devoid of remorse or guilt. Whereas *Bloody Newes* depicts the father's return to a violated household, *A Pittilesse Mother* portrays the act of murder itself. Margaret

Vincent is shown strangling one of her children while it is lying on a bed. A devil stands beside her, passing her pieces of rope. Vincent has already killed one child, and its body lies prostrate on the bed, head lolling lifelessly and its limbs stretched out.[28]

These images represent filicide as a grossly violent form of death, involving copious amounts of blood, decapitation and limbs lying at unnatural angles. A paradox of late twentieth-century murder investigations is that despite the intrusion into every conceivable aspect of the victim's body by forensic specialists and pathologists, as a culture we remain preoccupied with the victim's privacy. The body is swabbed, photographed and subjected to internal examinations. Samples of hair, bodily fluids and dirt are sealed inside packages for laboratory analysis. But what forensic practices reveal about the manner of the victim's death circulates solely within the investigative and legal process. In murder trials where the victim has been subjected to severe mutilation, dehumanization or degradation, jury members are sometimes reported to have become traumatized after viewing crime-scene and autopsy photographs. This evinces the fact that contact with the body of a victim is both unfamiliar and distressing, even when this contact is not primary but is experienced through the medium of photography. The modern viewer, accustomed to more lurid images, might not regard early modern illustrations of filicide as particularly shocking. However, it is important to recognize that twentieth-century images of murder in popular film and television are sanitized, with much of the horror of violent death removed. Even fictional accounts accommodate the notion that exposing the totality of the victim's experience to the public gaze is an unjustified violation, although they too focus upon the 'value' of the body as a commodity for forensic analysis.

The cultural representation of bodies which have been subjected to violent assault or abuse discloses ethical, moral and legal imperatives which act as mediators in the collective response to homicidal crimes. How a society perceives victims (what can be defined as its victimology) determines the status and treatment they receive posthumously. In his autobiographical account of his work as a forensic psychologist, Paul Britton describes his sense of revulsion when he was asked to look at some crime-scene photographs of a murder case for the first time. He writes that seeing the body of the female victim "was like looking at a statue that is more or less perfect except for these terrible ripping holes-*like a work of art despoiled by a vandal*" (italics my emphasis).[29] Although Britton is talking about the murder of a woman by a male perpetrator, this notion of the destruction and desecration of art is particularly resonant in connection with our theme of early modern mythologies of the monstrous mother. Popular accounts of maternal filicide insist on the dichotomy between the predatory mother and the pure, uncorrupted child.

As we have already noted, the murder investigation and consequent legal proceedings can be perceived as attempts at symbolic restoration, repairing the 'defilement' of the victim's body and agency by the perpetrator. A child could be regarded as constituting the 'purest' type of victim, since it is assumed to be both innocent and vulnerable. Consequently, its behaviour could not possibly be the cause of maternal violence. But to what extent can the body of a murdered child be represented? In denying the violated body privacy or 'dignity,' do these explicit images actually compound the brutalization of the child? By insisting on the child's status as a passive victim, do early modern images of filicide compromise the

child's agency? What is the relationship between the image and the text's reconstruction of the murder? Why should iconographic representations of filicide be necessary?

In *Bloody Newes*, the deviousness and premeditation of Mary Champion, who refuses to have her son baptized in accordance with her husband's wishes, is contrasted with the vulnerability of the child. Champion, who was born in Faversham, Kent, married John Champion, a Dover trader. They lived together for a number of years before Campion became pregnant. About six weeks after the birth of their son, the author describes how Champion, a "wicked minded woman took her opportunity; and on a day when her husband was abroad, took a great knife and cut off the Childs head."[30] John Champion's words when he arrives home are: "O thou bloody and inhumane wretch, what hast thou done?"[31] The text emphasizes that what is particularly heinous about Champion is her plausible simulation of maternal and housewifely dedication during the six weeks which elapsed between the birth and the day on which the murder was committed.

The two child victims in *A Pittilesse Mother*, although also killed by a mother who is a recusant, are older than the six-week-old baby in the Mary Champion case. The youngest child's life is saved because it was living with a wet nurse when the murders took place. Margaret Day, born in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, was a gentlewoman who had received a high standard of education. She had been married to Jaruis Vincent for more than ten years and they had had several children. Although sincerely pious, Vincent was continually troubled by self-doubt and was in the habit of asking ministers to visit and provide her with religious instruction. However, this zeal led to the ensnarement of Vincent's soul ("the sweet Lambe," as the author puts it) by "Romaine wolves."[32] The Pauline rule was that a wife should

consult with her husband if she was preoccupied with religious matters. The text suggests that Vincent is unable to cope with the excess of knowledge which her enquiries generate. Although insatiable, she lacks intellectual discernment, so she becomes overwhelmed.

Having herself been 'devoured' by Romish delusion, Vincent is transformed into the literal embodiment of the rapacious womb. We are told that she "desired to beget more of the same kinde, and from time to time made perswasive arguments to win her husband to the same opinion." Jaruis Vincent accused his wife of being "undutifull" and dismissed as "fond" her attempts to detach him from his fixed protestant beliefs. Jaruis's resistance did not discourage Vincent, but only increased her determination. She accepted the Catholic "maxim" that it is "merritorious yea and pardonable" to sacrifice the lives of any protestants who opposed the Catholic faith. Vincent rationalized that her children "were brought vp in blindnes and darksome errours, hoodwinkt (by her husbands instructions) from the true light." To save their souls from damnation, Vincent resolved to become "a Tygerous Mother."[33] The reader is intended to identify this metaphorical construction as an oxymoron: 'mother' cannot coexist with 'tiger.' Is Margaret Vincent a victim of Catholic proselytizing or an abusive mother who appropriates Catholic doctrine as a validating charter for murderous behaviour?

Although both the narrative and the cover illustration of *Bloody Newes* portray the child as a passive victim, *A Pittilesse Mother* confers a degree of agency on the children. While both images depict the infliction of maternal violence upon defenceless children, the author of *A Pittilesse Mother* interprets the children's innocent expressions and the elder child's smiles for its

mother as evidence of their desire for survival. The behaviour of a child should elicit protective and nurturing feelings from its mother. Vincent's lack of affective response to her children is conclusive evidence that she is 'unnatural.' Her claims that she acted in the best interests of her children are revealed to be duplicitous. The children are not passive 'rag dolls,' but (silenced) accusatory voices which are recovered in the text. Although violent, the killings do not suggest dissociation or frenzy. Both Margaret Vincent and Mary Champion are careful planners, choosing to commit the act on an occasion when their husbands are absent from home.

In *A Pittilesse Mother,* the image is not provided as a means of clarifying the meaning of the text. Instead, the text imposes meaning onto the image. In its portrayal of one child as a corpse and the other as still alive, *A Pittilesse Mother* suggests the tantalizing possibility of intervention. Will the father return in time to avert the tragedy? But the gaze of the spectator reiterates the anteriority of the image, as a representation of something that has already happened. In the context of the theory of maternal transgression as a slow-growing but virulent infection which becomes pernicious as a result of male negligence, the function of the images is not to gratuitously shock but rather to challenge male complacency.

By representing the murder of a child by its mother, these texts have to deny the perpetrator's status as a mother. The implication is that it is inconceivable that a 'normal' woman could commit such an act. The Gorgon of maternal violence demands an explanatory framework. Why has it occurred? What motivates a mother to inflict pain and suffering upon her own child? What separates the 'normal' mother from the 'bad' one? Although the graphic and emotive

descriptions of murdered children in accounts like *A Pittilesse Mother* and *Bloody News From Dover* might be regarded as exploitative, the authors could justify themselves by arguing that their text fulfils an important function in the protection of children. Their argument is that a direct correlation exists between specific behavioural patterns, such as the zealotry of the religious convert, absence from the household and female insubordination, and acts of extreme violence.

As an assessment of putative risk factors, the texts purport to enable male readers to intervene before a crime is actually committed. But since female disobedience is the single most important criterion in the seventeenth-century psychological profile of the aberrant mother, the prevention of maternal violence legitimizes the covert surveillance of every woman's behaviour. As the criminologist Ann Jones remarks: "the story of women who kill is the story of women."[34] A mother who kills not only inflicts violence upon the body of her child, she violates cultural expectations of motherhood. What is perhaps most insidious about the theory of maternal violence is the explicit assumption that women's behaviour inevitably escalates from a relatively minor and insignificant transgression into acts of murderous violence. It is the husband's responsibility to ensure that his authority is absolute and uncontested. As a tract on marital relations entitled *A Question Deeply concerning Married Persons, and such as intend to Marry: Propounded and Resolved according to the Scriptures* (1653) argued, an insubordinate woman was a liability to herself as well as to others: "The religious Wife therefore *for her own safety* as well as for Gods Honour, must submit her self to her own Husband, and be subject to him in every thing" (italics my emphasis).[35] Dod and

Cleaver, in encouraging women to 'go quietly' into the custody of their husbands, treat *all* women as potential criminals incapable of moral self-restraint.

The ubiquity of theories of the monstrous maternal body virtually anticipates the murderous mother as the logical confirmation of male anxieties. Simultaneously constructed as a victim of biological determinism and the sole agent of her actions, what representations of the filicidal mother reveal is the absence of a language to represent female violence. In *A Pittilesse Mother*, juxtapositions are used to iterate the horrific nature of Margaret Vincent's actions: "Oh blinded ignorance! Oh inhumane deuotion!"[36] A good example of the meaninglessness produced by attempts at defining maternal abuse is a remark made by Dr. Roy Meadows, director of Paadiatric Medicine at the University of Leeds: "We may teach, and I believe should teach, that mothers are always right, but at the same time, we must recognize that when mothers are wrong they can be terribly wrong."[37] Seventeenth-century popular discourse seems uncertain as whether to define maternal filicide as a symptom of delusion or as a deliberate act. This incoherence is a product of the dichotomies of 'good' and 'bad' upon which the mother is socially constructed. The 'evil' mother can only be perceived as an enigma. As the cover illustration of *Bloody Newes from Dover* shows, Mary Champion's behaviour is religious encoded. Female violence becomes explicable when situated in the context of the sect.

Although early modern filicide narratives can be regarded as sensationalist quasi-tabloid fictions, these texts also document the cultural valency of fantasies of the monstrous mother. What functions do these fantasies perform? What does the putative association between feminine deviance and radical religiosity tell

us about how sects were perceived in seventeenth-century culture? To discuss the interface between maternity and sectarianism, I want to suggest a twentieth-century parallel to the figure of the monstrous mother: namely, the mother suffering from the mental illness Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy (MBP). This disorder has already been discussed in Chapter Two, but I want to return to it here in the context of the dominance of MBP in contemporary fantasies of the bad mother.

The recent proliferation of MBP in popular fiction and television demonstrates that this relatively rare psychiatric condition has passed from being the subject of case histories into discursive space. One example is *Little White Lies*, a novel by Elizabeth McGregor, which was adapted for BBC television and first screened in July 1988. *Little White Lies* is a psychological thriller, its story involving a mysterious death, sexual infidelity and financial irregularities.

The tortuous narrative structure characteristic of the thriller genre replicates the enigma at the centre of *Little White Lies*: the character of Julia who, it transpires, suffers from MBP. Is this enigma femininity or pathology? Initially, Julia appears to be a loving, if over-protective mother, loyal wife and solicitous friend. But gradually this 'façade' begins to disintegrate. Beth, the heroine whose husband David is killed in a road accident, suspects that Julia has had an affair with her husband. Tensions begin to emerge between Julia and her husband Oliver. Julia insists that their daughter, Rosie, is unwell and keeps her in bed. Oliver is sceptical and accuses his wife of being neurotic. Julia becomes acutely depressed and attempts suicide. Beth arrives in time to find Julia and Rosie lying unconscious in a fume-filled car in the garage. Both

survive, although Rosie is more seriously affected by carbon monoxide poisoning and has to stay in hospital for several days. Medical tests reveal traces of tranquillizers in Rosie's blood, administered by Julia so that her daughter would not be able to resist when she was put into the car. Julia had been giving Rosie tranquillizers for a considerable period of time, which explains why Rosie constantly complained of tiredness and was kept in bed by her mother.

Julia is 'sectioned' by a panel of social workers and psychiatrists, despite her pleas that she is a good mother, and she is not allowed to see Rosie. When Julia is released from hospital, she enlists Beth's help to find Rosie. Beth has misgivings but agrees, because Julia's performance as the betrayed mother is very plausible. When they locate Oliver, he refuses to allow Julia access to Rosie. She kills him with a knife, and seizes their daughter. Julia is pursued, but manages to reach home with Rosie, where she has a psychotic breakdown. Deluded into thinking that she can fly, Julia is killed when she walks out of a top-floor window. Rosie is rescued unharmed.

A key element of *Little White Lies*, which I would argue is true of all texts which are preoccupied with the monstrous mother, is its duplicitousness. It simultaneously elicits and denies the meaning of maternal deviance. By definition, a psychological thriller is concerned with the motives for criminality as much as identifying and securing the culprit. But if *Little White Lies* makes the behaviour of the monstrous mother comprehensible, it can no longer sustain our fascination with her. As a result, the detective plot of the psychological thriller does not expose the 'truth' of maternal transgression, but locates Julia within an economy of psychiatric,

forensic and popular gazes. The reader/viewer is confronted with multiple and contradictory readings. Is Julia mentally ill, or is she evil?

In this way, the text mimics the actions of Julia herself, who is knowable by the other participants in the drama as a series of assumed representations. An accomplished actress, Julia deploys her protean abilities to manipulate and deceive others. She vacillates between infantile passivity and egocentricism, manifesting both the helplessness and emotional dependence of the betrayed wife and the ruthlessness of the sociopath. Julia is a hybrid of the criminal and the sexual deviant, at once 'bad' and 'sick.' Comparing *Little White Lies* with the seventeenth-century infanticide texts, we can see how the blurred distinction between pathology and criminality is not seen as problematic and may even be functional. The monstrous mother can never be 'normal,' therefore she must be shown to possess some organic lesion or psychological imbalance which explicates but can never expiate the acts she has committed. The extreme turbulence maternal deviance inflicts upon cultural stereotypes of mothering means that the response to a 'bad' mother is reciprocally violent. The transgressive mother may be a victim of her aberrant physiology or psychology, but her offences themselves are represented as active and intentional.

Julia's flawless performances as wife, mother and friend raise questions about how we can distinguish between normalcy and sexual perversion. It is here, rather than in evaluations of the mother's culpability, that anxieties are created over differentiation. How do we identify the monstrous mother when she is so adept at dissimulation? There are significant differences between the early modern period and the late twentieth century in the specific threat

that the monstrous mother is perceived to have. Popular representations, such as an episode of the BBC drama series *Casualty* and Patricia Cornwell's novel *The Body Farm* (1994), regard maternal child abuse as being synonymous with MBP. In the seventeenth century, a radical political and spiritual agenda both induces and compounds the threat posed by the monstrous mother to her children. She is an agent of sectarian groups or Roman Catholicism, programmed to infiltrate entire protestant communities.

There are startling similarities between the speculum texts of female monstrosity which urge men to be more alert invigilators of their wives' behaviour and the methodology of MBP surveillance as described in clinical manuals. Both are preoccupied with formulating strategies to challenge the 'invisibility' of the monstrous mother. The seventeenth-century commentators of the Mary Champion and Margaret Vincent cases assume that their roles as obedient wives and loving mothers are stagings. In *Patient Or Pretender. Inside the Strange World of Factitious Disorders,* Marc Feldman and Charles Ford comment: "It is often difficult to differentiate between overly concerned mothers...and MBP mothers because most Munchausen-by-proxy mothers seem so normal. Even psychological testing does not typically reveal them to be as disturbed as one might expect."[38]

The inference is that however plausible and credible the monstrous mother may appear to be, her affect is not authentic: it is simulated. As we saw in Chapter Two, hysteria troubles physicians because it leaves no residue--no organic lesion--on the body. They are confronted with a patient whose symptoms proliferate, and yet they are unable to identify what is producing the symptoms. In the case of MBP this very absence raises the possibility that the *patient* (I use the term advisedly) rather than the pathology may elude detection,

that she may remain invisible.

Despite the fact that statistically men as well as women can suffer from MBP, cultural representations of the disorder reveal a distinct gender bias in figuring the mother as the eponymous MBP patient. Similarly, we find no cases of sectarian-induced paternal filicide in seventeenth-century texts. Is this because paternal transgression is unimaginable in a symbolic system where the father constitutes the locus of power? Narratives of maternal violence depend upon the absoluteness of the husband's authority, which is being reinscribed even as it is threatened by the mother. Whereas femininity and motherhood are criminalized, the husband occupies a custodial role. Early modern narratives of the monstrous mother promote the infantalized and dependent wife as a culturally acceptable mode of femininity. Ultimately this reinforces the dominance of the husband, assuring him of his potency. Her neediness and incapacity can be accommodated by his plenitude.

This custodial role is evident in the methods of detection utilized in cases where MBP is suspected. The use of video cameras can be the only way of categorically proving that the mother is inducing illness in her child, by such means as injecting faeces into intravenous lines or contaminating urine samples with her own menstrual blood.[39] The physician, in assuming the role of the detective, passes from the clinical into the legal realm. The gender of the doctor is irrelevant: he or she appropriates that masculinist authority which justifies the interrogative gaze. Once the monstrous mother is unmasked, her subversive power is neutralized.

The seventeenth-century filicide texts induce male hysteria in their readers in order to reinforce the asymmetry of gender relations within marriage. The enculturation of the MBP mother in late

twentieth-century popular drama and fiction suggests the power with which the monstrous mother is credited on a fantasy level. As scenarios in which the family romance is violently fractured, both seventeenth- and twentieth-century narratives suggest that substitution of the weak husband/father with an absolute, authoritarian patriarch would prevent the escalation of maternal disobedience into acts of violence. When Margaret Vincent blames Jaruis for the murders, because he refused to be "ruld, and by mee conuerted," the implication is that 'ruling' is solely the husband's prerogative.[40] In effect, these are fantasies of recontainment: pre-emptive action will suppress the anatagonism which lies at the heart of marriage, concealing the inconsistencies of family life.

In relating the fate of the murderous mother, the narratives enact these assimilative fantasies. In *Little White Lies,* Julia's identification with the birds on the roof occurs at the point where she becomes irrecoverably psychotic. She speaks to the birds in a little-girl voice and believes that she can fly. Julia's desire to transform herself suggests that she is not only trying to elude capture but also her own body. Is this fragile, infantilised woman the 'real' Julia? Unable to escape, she is trapped inside her pathological body, the abuser turned victim.

Julia's fate, parallel to that of Lady Macbeth, is a descent into madness which reinscribes the weakness and insufficiency of the female body. Julia is guilty of the same larceny as Paracelsus's witches: she usurps a masculine role which she is biologically incapable of sustaining. It is on the roof, trying to transform herself into a bird, that Julia is finally unmasked. Devoid of her role-playing skills, Julia ceases to be protean and becomes univocal: the mad woman. Her identification with the birds suggests

that she has internalized her position within the patriarchal field of vision, since the slang term 'bird' connotes an objectified and sexualized female body. Julia's death cannot be interpreted as suicide, because her intention is not to kill herself, but rather to transform her self into another protean form.

Prior to her death, Julia regresses into an infantile position which evinces both her defectiveness in the absence of male authority and the fact that she is being consumed by the morbidity of her own body. We might ask whether the final scenes of *Little White Lies* explicate the 'riddle' of maternal femininity. Although the narrative purports to divest Julia of her staged roles, it seems uncertain about what to do with her when she is figuratively naked. Her death, as I have argued, constitutes a form of symbolic restitution, but the ambivalence concerning Julia's intentions reiterates the circularity where 'mad' flows seamlessly into 'bad.'

Julia's articulation of her desire to transform herself into a bird can be read as a symptom of her delusion and therefore as unintelligible, but it raises an interesting point: in the absence of a language to articulate maternal violence, how does the mother represent herself in language? Is it necessary for our fantasies of the monstrous mother as 'enigma' that she remain silent? Does the legal process of interrogation, indictment and restitution constitute an attempt to decipher maternal violence?

The interdiction against suicide within the Judaeo-Christian tradition means that self-killing necessarily falls outside the perimeters of early modern religious, moral and legal practices of assimilation and recuperation. Margaret Vincent, thwarted in her desire to continue killing, decides to commit suicide with one of the

garters she used to strangle her children. She believes that she will receive the same rewards in heaven as her children, but the narrator tells us that her 'weakness' prevents her from killing herself.[41] Vincent appears before Mr. Roberts of Willisden, a Justice of the Peace, who remands her to Newgate to await trial. She openly admits what she has done, but shows no remorse. Many people visit her in prison and urge her to repent, but she refuses. She wears a crucifix around her neck and carries various holy relics. She throws away a Bible which is given to her, an act which compounds the sacrilege that she has committed. The author laments that "the blood of her owne body should haue no more power to pearce remorse into her Iron naturd heart."[42]

Four days into her imprisonment, Vincent acknowledges the horrific nature of her crime: "she earnestly beliued she had eternally deserued hell fire for the murther of her children, and that she earnestly repented the deed." She is found guilty of filicide and sentenced to death. We are told that she received this judgement patiently.[43]

Although Vincent is segregated from society, before her trial she is visited by a stream of ministers and acquaintances, who are participants in what we might call a ritual process of amelioration. Undissuaded by Vincent's obstinancy, the visitors bring books by protestant authors (which she refuses to read on the grounds that they will harm her) and confront her with her crimes in an attempt to elicit an emotional response from her.

This ritual has nothing to do with the legal process of establishing Vincent's guilt nor can it provide absolution if Vincent manifests appropriate penitence. However, it evinces the cultural investment in extricating Vincent from Romish influence and

at least partially restoring her status as a member of the protestant community. Margaret Vincent's failure to take her own life can be regarded as providential, given the fact that early modern culture stressed the importance of the individual's preparation for death. In prison, Vincent is encouraged to accept responsibility for her actions as part of these preparations. Filicide narratives regard the absence of affect as the most obscene feature associated with acts of maternal violence. It is precisely this emotionality, which is integral to the social construction of motherhood, which the purification rituals are attempting to recuperate. Vincent's language of resistance--her absence of remorse, her argument that Biblical language is harmful, her lack of cooperation--is treated as 'mad,' as symptomatic of her fragmented self, which has been perverted by exposure to Catholic doctrine. This language is therefore read as delusory rather than oppositional, and ultimately it is sublimated by the reiteration of polarized concepts of maternal experience, so that grief is the only thing that Margaret Vincent can legitimately articulate.

In *Bloody Newes from Dover*, the transgressive mother is also reabsorbed into society after she is apprehended, but this assimilation occurs at the expense of her sanity. We are not told whether Mary Champion considers suicide, nor does the text end with her execution, but it does describe the transformation from the presumptuous, brazen murderess of the title page into a remorseful mother traumatized by what she has done. Champion "can no wayes fixe her eyes upon any thing but presently (she conceives) the poore Babe to appear before her without a head."

Champion's hallucinations, which compel her to constantly re-enact the murder, do not simply suggest that violence traumatizes the

perpetrator, but insist that in committing murder, the *female* perpretrator inflicts violence upon herself. The mother's disintegration is the corollary to filicide. Champion suffers from 'distraction' which, as we have discussed earlier, is an early modern term for a type of psychopathology characterized by inarticulacy and confusion. But it is precisely when Champion is most incoherent that her expression becomes meaningful. She simultaneously confirms her own guilt and demonstrates the fallible nature of the female body. Mary Champion's psychic collapse is represented as the logical conclusion of her status as an individual whose social and moral integrity has become fissured. Her role as an 'invisible' host of satanic contagion is transitory and will inevitably be succeeded by her destruction. The concluding remarks of *Bloody Newes* appropriate this notion of the ruptured female body as a metaphor for social disunity:

> Thus may we see, that where division and controversie doth arise, sad effects will suddenly follow: for no sooner can there a breach appear; but presently Sathan is ready to stop it up, by infusing his deluding spirit into their hearts, for the increasing of variance, discord, and contention, and when once it hath taken possession, it is a hard matter to remove it, but still lyeth open to the deluding snare of the Divil, being ready to Be entrapped upon any occasion.[44]

Is the text referring to marital discord here or to the proliferation of sectarian groups? It would appear that there is little need to differentiate between them. The family, as the basic unit of protestantism, is a microcosm of the wider culture. This is

evident in the political scutiny of marital relations between Eleanor Davies and her husbands. In *The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal* (1646), Davies describes her reaction to the numerous attempts to dissuade her from prophesying. Her first tract, *A Warning to the Dragon and All His Angels,* was published in 1625. She had begun writing it immediately after hearing the heavenly voice at Englefield. She personally delivered a copy of the text to Archbishop Abbott, who was attending parliament in Oxford, having, like the rest of Charles's government, fled London, which was in the grip of a plague outbreak. Davies chose Abbott because of his rabid opposition to Catholicism, and felt he would reinforce her case that Charles needed to do more for English protestantism. When Sir John Davies learnt what his wife had done, he was furious at what he construed as her defiance, probably because he nurtured hopes that the King would give him a promotion. He ill-advisedly tossed a copy of *A Warning* into the fire. Davies retaliated by fashioning an anagram from his own name: John Daves became Joves Hand. Sir John was starkly informed that "within three years to expect the mortal blow."[45]

Archibald Douglas, Davies's second husband, also destroyed some of his wife's books and apparently colluded with Charles I in trying to suppress her prophecies. After she predicted that the Duke of Buckingham would not survive beyond August 1628, Davies received a visit from a royal aide at her house at St. James, London. "The king not pleased with such Alarms," she wrote, "[he] commanded one of his Bed-chamber, Mr. *Kirk,* to go from him, *and know what I had to do with his Affairs; and if I desisted not, he would take another course:* To which my answer was, I would take my course against him, namely, Sir *Archibald Dowglas* that had burnt my papers to purchase his favor, and that he and all should know shortly."[46] Patrick Young, uncle of

Archibald Douglas, moved into the St. James house after Davies moved out. He suffered losses to his valuable library when the St. James property burnt down. This convinced Davies that the state's perception of her as a liability meant that Kirk's insinuations were not empty threats.

Eleanor Davies recognized that the king was leaning heavily on her husbands to 'tame' and domesticate her. Her prophecies were no longer amusing: some of them constituted treason and many had upset numerous people of rank, not least Henrietta Maria, whom Davies accused of being a Jezebel in *Samson's Fall Presented to the House* (1642). But she refused to capitulate, actively resisting her domestication by forcing her conflicts with her husbands and with the state into the public domain. Serving Douglas with the warning of divine retribution for destroying her prophecies in the presence of witnesses whom she persuaded to act as notaries, Davies made her husband a bizarre promise: "*That if in the Moneth of June next some such wonderful judgement from God came not upon him, then in a Sheet I would walk to Pauls barefoot.*"[47] Douglas was "strooken bereft of his sences" in 1631.[48]

Eleanor Davies's strategic arsenal was formidable. Highly educated, she was both literate and articulate; she became knowledgable about legal matters from her first husband Sir John and knew how to circumvent state censorship by travelling to the Netherlands to get her texts printed. But perhaps her most powerful tool was her familiarity with patriarchal and aristocratic structures, which she both manipulated to her advantage and subverted. Davies's proclivity for anagrams convinced her that her noble lineage figured significantly in the divine plan. If her tendency to add family history to her prophecies irritates the reader

as inappropriate or arrogant, it also points to Davies's perception of herself as an aristocratic woman as well as a prophet.

Because her prophecies seized authority away from its lawful investiture in the figure of the monarch or husband, Davies found herself relegated to the daughter's place. Patriarchy no longer simply enabled her: it was also the means of subjugating her and erasing her voice. Since Davies's conflict with her husbands did not cause her to experience, nor be incapacitated by, the emotions of shame and abjection supposedly consistent with the publically 'defamed' woman, she perceived her political antagonists, Charles I and William Laud, as surrogate husbands.

It is in the feud with Laud that we see the marital conflict amplified and exposed to its fullest extent. In *Begin: As not unknowne* (1633), which describes the execution of Laud's order to burn Davies's books at St. Paul's Cross, she makes explicit what is implicit in *The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal*. The destruction of her texts is no longer a banal and spiteful form of opposition. It becomes a specific and heinous form of violence: paternal filicide. Although the *Appeal* was printed in 1646, the same year in which Douglas's mental collapse occurred, it also gives a retrospective account of the consequences of Sir John Davies's attempts to intimidate his wife. As she had predicted, he died in 1626.

Therefore, at the time she wrote *As not unknowne*, Davies had seen what she construed as the futility of patriarchal opposition to her prophetic authority. In this text, she fashions herself as a figure at once asexual and maternal, portraying Laud as the emasculated father whose superfluity to the generative process elicits murderous violence against the mother's offspring. Davies splices together the image of the filicidal parent with masculinity into a

"BEAST...horned like the Lambe, harted like a Wolfe." Her children's "dead Bodies shrouded in loose sheets of paper. Lye in the streets of the Great Cittie." Simultaneously asserting her own generative autonomy and articulating her lack of masculine potency, Davies makes a plea to Charles I, imbuing him with life-giving/resurrecting properties: "If your Highnesse please to speake the word, the spirit of life will enter into them, they will stand upon their feete."[49] Although Davies's text is innovative in its insistence upon the mother's plenitude, her efforts to extricate herself from the scene of marital conflict is only partly successful. Her identification with patriarchy remains ambivalent, vacillating between rejection and dependence. Davies is in retaliatory mode, aware of the mythology of the monstrous mother which reads her texts as artistic perversions.

Eleanor Davies was not a member of a nonconformist group. Until Charles I proved a disappointment in refusing to champion the cause of the protestant brethren across the English Channel while being only too tolerant of Catholicism at home, Davies counted herself as a Royalist. What distinguishes her from other vocal women prophets, preachers and ecstatics of the Civil War period is that her dissent was not institutionalized (I use this term advisedly, given that a major feature of the sectarian movements was their rejection of formal structures; nevertheless, those groups which tolerated and even encouraged women participants constituted an *informal* system which enables and legitimizes this activity). But the nature of the official response to an incident in which Davies and a number of other women participated suggests both the anxiety about female collectives and the sense in which dissent became feminized.

In 1636, Davies visited the cathedral city of Lichfield, staying

at an inn called the Angel. During her stay, she met a group of women, including Marie Noble and Susan Walker. Together they attended a service at the cathedral, where they scandalized the rest of the congregation by arguing rather loudly over who should sit where. Davies decided to sit in the seats reserved for the wives of the ecclesiastical elite. She wrote *The Appeal to the Throne* and sent a copy to the Archbishop of Lichfield. Her 'presumption' was apparently boundless: she also sat in the Archbishop's throne. In *Bethlehem Signifying the House of Bread,* Davies describes how she declared herself "Primate and Metropolitan" and daubed the cathedral's altar and hangings with a mixture of tar, sawdust and water. Her companions, Mrs. Noble and Mrs. Walker, owner of the Angel, supported Davies, insisting that: "Lady Davies would better justify that filthy act than those that caused the hanging, to be put up." Mrs. Walker was ordered to eject Davies from her lodgings, but refused to comply. Davies does not mention these other women in her writing, although they were vocal in championing her case. Lady Weston asserted that Davies had daubed the cathedral as an act of conscience.[50]

These women sympathized with Davies's objections to the influence of Roman Catholicism in the excessive adornment of the cathedral. To the authorities, who saw Davies's behaviour as an act of desecration, the women were guilty of a crime against the state. Davies ironically commented that the "outrage" caused by her actions would have been more a appropriate reaction to "some *Gunpowder treason.*" In the event, the authorities' fears about what Davies would do next ("*who knows what she may do in other Mother Churches*"), provoked their decision to incarcerate her in Bethlehem hospital for two years.[51] If, as is likely, Davies reproduced this remark about the mother

churches verbatim, it is illustrative of the way that official discourses position her within the category of anti-mother.

Whereas Davies and her supporters detected in the richly-arrayed interior of Lichfield cathedral a Laudian influence, the ecclesiastical authorities retaliated with a focus upon the nurturing and nourishing function of the church, which Davies's actions had violated. The state depoliticized Davies's protest against what she saw as the corruption of English protestantism. Vandalizing Lichfield was a symptom of her own gynandry. Although Davies was legally guilty of treason, she was not treated as a political prisoner and sent to the Gatehouse at Westminster for a second time (she was sent there in 1633 for printing subversive material). Davies wrote of being kept "quick in *Bedlams* loathsome *Prison,*" which might strike the reader as surprising, given that she was segregated from the other prisoners in superior accommodation.[52] But undoubtedly what she found so intolerable was precisely the determination on the part of the authorities to pathologize her resistance. The judge who ordered her confinement exemplified the official attitude that she was insignificant: "saying within himself not difficult to judge when *Though I fear not God nor reverance Man*: yet least this never ceasing *Widow* by her Writing."[53]

Many antisectarian texts represent the dissenting group as a female collective. In a postscript to *The Snare of the Devill Discovered* (1658), which documents how poverty induced Lydia Rogers to make a compact with the devil, the anonymous author adds a postscript about a group of women at Newbury "who fell off from the Faith they once professed, into new pretended Revelations." One of them claimed to have had a vision that she would ascend into heaven "*in a fiery Charriot*" on a certain day. News of this spread through

the community, and on the day about a hundred spectators gathered to watch:

> and after long waiting, at last there flew over the place a flock of *Wildegeese*, or (as it is supposed the Devill in that shape) which they of the Sect seeing, cryed out, *He is come, he is come,* expecting to see her carried away presently; but the *Wilde geese* were gone, and she left to see the folly of her new Pretended Revelations.[54]

It is not surprising that Eleanor Davies's coterie of women was regarded as significant by her detractors. In the extract cited above, the putative sophistry of sects is articulated in terms of feminine stagings or masquerades. The allegations made by the woman are false. Early modern theories of maternal imagination argued that women were teratogenic. But because the monster's visible deformities signify an absence rather than a presence, what women ultimately generate is a no-thing. Sectarian women may lure spectators with claims of the prodigious, but ultimately their creations are insubstantial and may even be demonic. Evidently, the association between sects and women was an irresistible one.

Just as fantasies of motherhood are highly influential in cultural attitudes towards the maternal role, knowledge about sects was to a considerable extent derived from persistent but not necessarily accurate fantasies. When James I inveighs against sectarianism in *Basilikon Doron* (1603), he cites the Family of Love as the most seditious group. James wrote: "as to the name of Puritans, I am not ignorant that the style thereof doth properly belong to that vile sect amongst the Anabaptists, called the Family of love...Of this

special sect I principally mean, when I speak of Puritans; divers of them, as *Browne, Penrie,* and others."[55] Robert Browne was a separatist and John Penry co-writer of the notorious Martin Marprelate tracts: neither they, nor the Familists, were Anabaptists.

James I's linking together of Puritanism, Anabaptism and Familism suggests that he is deliberately using them in a pejorative sense. It is less likely that he was confused by the doctrinal differences between the various factions, but rather that he was no less susceptible than any other social commentator to the fantasies of the bad mother which pervade anti-sectarian literature during this period. The single most important factor in the perception of Anabaptism was its rejection of infant baptism. In fact, the Anabaptists were not the most radical or seditious of the seventeenth-century sects.

James I could have opted for more contentious groups to argue his case. Later seventeenth-century sects like the Levellers and the Ranters, which emerged during the Civil War, although obviously formed many years after James I was writing, do coincide with the publication of anti-Anabaptist tracts like *Bloody Newes from Dover.* We can conclude that Anabaptism's reputation as the eponymous sectarian threat was remarkably persistent, despite the fact that both the Levellers and the Ranters were advocates of political and social reforms which were sufficient to qualify them as far more extreme and radical.

To reinforce my argument that the fantasy of the evil mother coalesces with that of the sect, we need to examine another common element: that of sexuality. The Family of Love which James I referred to originated in the sixteenth century. Its members followed the

teachings of Henry Nicholas (1502?-1580?), a prophet from the Netherlands. The Famialists were principally known for the rejection of numerous traditional values, notably in substituting communal polygamy for monogamy. The Family of Love was active in England between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By a process of cultural osmosis whereby the alleged characteristics of one sect become infused into all the others, dissenting sects were regarded as torrid zones of illicit sexual activity.

Mary Pennington (1625-1682), who married into the aristocracy and elicited the disapproval of the ruling elite when she chose to become a separatist, documented her experiences in her autobiography, *A Brief Account of my exercises, from my childhood*. She described how, when she attended a nonconformist congregation, it was automatically assumed that this was a ruse "to meet young men."[56] Pennington married twice, to Sir William Springett and, after his death, to Isaac Pennington. Both men shared her desire for religious truth, and they took to visiting groups such as the Independents, Quakers and other nonconformists in order to evaluate their doctrines and practices. Pennington resolved that she "would rather be without a religion, until the Lord taught me one."[57] In antisectarian texts, a history of transient membership of different religious groups is regarded as characteristic of women's emotional lability. Such changeableness also infers sexual promiscuity. Heresiographers seem to articulate a latent anxiety about the vagrancy of female desire, connotative of both the way that this desire circulates within the community and its insatiableness.

The title of *The Ranter's Monster* (1652) is a quibble on the 'monster''s identity. Is it the mother, Mary Adams, who claims to be pregnant with the Second Coming of the Messiah? Or is it the grotesque

child she gives birth to? Adams, of Tillingham in Essex, claimed that she was the Virgin Mary and declared that anyone who doubted her was damned. Her child is neither the product of supernatural intervention nor of asexual generation, but has been conceived outside marriage. Adams's promiscuity is never made explicit in the text, but is inferred from an implied causal relationship between her 'provocative' speech before the birth and the sexual pathology which consumes her body after the child is born. Like the Newbury women in the postscript to *The Snare of the Devill Discovered*, Adams stages a credible providential scenario in order to evade the cultural sanctions against fornication.

Adams is imprisoned on charges of blasphemy before her pregnancy comes to term. She had declared that "all the Gospel that had bin taught heretofore, was false...[and] that Christ was not yet come in the flesh."[58] The allegations against her indicate that she is regarded as a calculated seductress rather than as a deluded mad woman. As the monstrous mother, the antithesis of nurturance, she devours scripture with her body, reconstituting it in obscene and heretical forms. Adams appropriates divine authority to force others to spectate in the quasi-pornographic display of her pregnant body. The increase in the size of her body correlates to a shift in the collective response to her transgression: from disapproval to social exclusion. No longer simply unseemly, her body becomes offensive to the moralizing communal gaze which demands its removal.

When the time arrives for the child to be born, a midwife and a group of local women attend Adams in her cell to assist in her delivery. But their efforts seem to be futile, for Adams lies in agony for a period of eight days, unable to give birth. On the ninth day, Adams gives birth to "the most ugliest, ill-shapen *Monster* that ever

eyes beheld; which being dead born, they buried it with speed, for it was so loathsome to behold, that the womens hearts trembled to look upon it." Early modern theories of teratogeny held that 'monstrousness' did not merely connote the visually grotesque, but betrayed the monster's origins. Adams is guilty of maternal negligence as well as immorality--she has, in effect, murdered her own child while it was developing inside her body. She does not recover her health after the monster's birth, but "rotted and consumed as she lay, being from the head to the foot as full of botches, blains, boils, & stinking scabs, as ever one could stand by another." This graphic image of Adams's physical disintegration is the text's most explicit reference to her transgressive sexuality. She is figured as the syphilitic prostitute whose disease is the punishment for her promiscuity. The other women urge Adams to repent, but she claims she cannot, for "*her heart was so hardened in wickedness.*" She asks for a knife to pare her nails with, and as soon as she is left alone with it, she "ript up her bowels with the same knife."[59] By disembowelling herself, Adams simultaneously attacks the gluttony of her own desire and colludes in the exposure of her monstrous body.

The early modern association between contagion, communication and sexually-transmitted disease provides an epistemological framework in which the two distinct cultural phenomena of the transgressive woman and religious dissent are explicable in terms of a symbiotic relationship. Formerly "a most excellent pattern of true Holiness," Adams "fell" into Anabaptism, where "her former zeal to the divine Ordinance was extinguished and washed away, by being rebaptized."[60] After several months, she became a member of the Family of Love, but remained with them for an even shorter period,

eventually joining the Ranters. The Ranters' tenure was relatively short: they emerged in the aftermath of Charles I's execution and the abolition of the House of Lords in the 1650s. They asserted that their practices of swearing and communal polygamy were justified as forms of mysticism.[61] Adams' s manipulation of biblical language identifies her as a Ranter. She declares that: "*woman was made to be a helper for man, and that it was no sin to lie with any man, whether Batchelor, Widdower, or married; but a thing lawful.*"[62] Adams's comment suggests the possibility that her child was conceived in an adulterous liason.

The writers of heresiographical texts like *The Ranter's Monster* insisted that radical groups were homogenous and highly organised. In fact, as in the case of the Ranters, this was a fallacy. In one important respect the situation of many putative dissenters was similar to that of protestant conformists: they were individuals who shared broadly similar beliefs but were not necessarily interested in collectivism. Much of what was said about sects was fabricated. Accuracy was sacrificed to amplifying the symbolic resonances of the sect in cultural fantasies of infiltration and pollution. The figure of the woman, specifically the mother, became a metonym for the sect. Although she was already scrutinized, the sectarian threat justified even more stringent surveillance. Additionally, it perpetuated the ambivalence about whether the woman as/or sect member was a victim or a perpetrator. The mother was always particularly susceptible to sectarian influence, but she was also its most ruthless and violent agent. If exposure to sectarianism was a process in which the mother was transformed, the final stage of this metamorphosis is her emergence as a host, masquerading as a wholesome and unblemished body to mask the infection which she carries.

In *The Ranter's Monster* we can observe the same processes of dissimulation, exposure and retribution which are apparent in twentieth-century representations of the monstrous mother. If the association between female sexuality and dissent produced numerous misconceptions about sectarian practices, it also appears to dramatize the fantasies surrounding maternal femininity without resolving any of the paradoxes which are intrinsic to these fantasies. The texts on maternal transgression which we have been discussing regard women as agents in their own (sexual) desire.

To consider further the relationship between dissent, gender and desire, we need to examine incidents which involve men as well as women. Is excessive masculine desire also regarded as a destructive social force? We will be looking at two conspiracies involving false allegations of prophetic ability and sexual impropriety. What are the gender dynamics of these relationships? Are women regarded as the infatuated victims of male corruption and exploitation? Or is it the men who are infatuated? How do communities respond to the perpetrators of such conspiracies, who have extorted money from them and deceived them with staged prophetic outpourings? Are these crimes understood as sexual offences or acts of blasphemy? Identifying whose is the performing body, and who is inducing or prompting its postures, determines the apportioning of blame and what type of sanctions are then imposed.

Seductions: Prophecy, Blasphemy & the Eroticized Female Body

In *Pseudochristus* (1650), Humphrey Ellis, a minister in Winton, investigated a notorious case "acted" in Southampton by William Frankelin and Mary Gadbury, who claimed to be the reincarnated Christ

and his bride.[63] Ellis's intention is not to produce a sensationalist account of the deception, but rather to amass what he considers to be relevant biographical details about Frankelin and Gadbury. The text does not dispute that the perpetrators are guilty, but implies that mitigating factors need to be considered in such cases if the offender was of previous good character and male. Ellis begins with a history of William Frankelin who, at the time of the deception, was aged about forty. Born at Overton, near Andover, Frankelin became an apprentice rope-maker in London and lived in Stepney with his wife and three children for fifteen years. He had a reputation as a civil, sober and pious man. In later life, members of his family fell sick with the plague, including Frankelin himself, who also became afflicted with religious melancholy.

At his trial, Frankelin produced medical certificates testifying that he had suffered from a "distraction" of the brain in 1646. Having perused these, Ellis comments that there is no evidence of mental illness after 1646, when Frankelin was treated using phlebotomy (blood-letting). He himself visited Frankelin in prison at Winchester on a number of occasions, and detected no sign of illness: "whatever he spake, was sufficient to shew him to be a man all this time in a sober minde, enjoying the right use of his *Intellectuals*, his understanding faculty, according to the strength of those parts he was endued withall, very free from any such natural distemper."[64] Ellis's opinion is collaborrated by evidence from other individuals familiar with Frankelin, who confirm the absence of any visible sign of mental disorder.

In spite of the fact that he is unconvinced by Frankelin's claim that he was *non compos mentis* when he participated in the conspiracy, Ellis is reluctant to censure him for committing a premeditated act.

He "cannot but say, the man hath been mightily possessed with a spiritual frenzy." This "frenzy" is entirely consistent with the rational, thoughtful individual Ellis has conversed with in prison and the devout, industrious family man whom Ellis has had reliable reports of. Ellis continues with an account of Frankelin's deteriorating behaviour which preceded his relationship with Mary Gadbury. He began to have "delusions" in which he was convinced that he was Christ, to the embarrassment of the protestant congregation of which he was a member. He would recover from these, only to relapse again. He uttered blasphemies against God and spoke in tongues (glossolalia). Frankelin started to physically abuse his own wife, and even denied that he was married to her. He began to have affairs with other women. At this point he was excluded from his church.[65]

Ellis's biography of Mary Gadbury is more elliptical, in the sense that it is impaired by insufficient information but, significantly, the author is far less reticent in levelling criticism at her. Gadbury, aged about thirty, was estranged from her husband, James Gadbury, who left her to live in Holland. According to Ellis, James went with a servant, but it is unclear whether this servant was female or if he was having an affair with her. Mary followed him at some stage, but they separated shortly afterwards. She lived in Watling Street, London, with her daughter and earned her living in selling ribbons to gentlewomen.

Ellis treats Gadbury's claims that she was a deeply pious woman with scepticism, remarking "she had been noted in times past to have been of a vicious, lewd, light behaviour." Gadbury had admitted that she was once *accused* of keeping a brothel. The emphasis is important, for even Ellis confesses that no concrete evidence regarding

Gadbury's former life exists. Strictly speaking, this sort of 'evidence' is inadmissible. But outside the courtroom, such allegations are extremely persistent. Ellis himself refrains from making a judgement about Gadbury's sexual morality, claiming that it is up to his readers to decide.[66]

But Ellis's pose as an unbiased auditor is disingenuous, for he is uncritically reliant on unsubstantiated accusations and rumours. The 'evidence' he uncovers is an inevitable accompaniment to the cultural exposure of a woman's criminal status. A potent mythology is generated which insists that the signs of her latent criminality existed prior to the point at which her behaviour escalated into offending. A common example of this is the trait of the 'evil eye,' apparently detected by many people who came into contact with the offender before she was arrested, tried and punished for her crimes but which they do not articulate until the legal process has certified her guilt. Once the woman achieves notoriety as a criminal, these individuals claim that her eyes appeared 'callous,' 'cold' or 'vicious.' They were briefly exposed to the terrifying gaze of the Gorgon, but escaped to tell the tale. Similarly, a woman who 'steals' another woman's husband must therefore exhibit the behaviour of an embryonic sexual deviant. Hence, merely the accusation that Gadbury had managed a brothel is entirely credible. For Gadbury, to have her sexuality questioned is indistinguishable from actually *having* questionable sexuality.

In contrast, Frankelin's sexual morality is not questioned at all, in spite of the fact that he abandoned his wife and family, whereas it appears to be James Gadbury who initiated the separation from Mary. Frankelin's abusiveness and blasphemous behaviour is excusable because, prior to being afflicted with the "frenzy," he was (and,

according to Ellis, is once again) a rational, sensible and sober man. Arguably, the failure of a cerebral disorder to explain Frankelin's behaviour does not deny the possibility of mitigation, since a religious "frenzy" (such as demonic possession) could have a similarly catastrophic effect on a normally well-adjusted individual as an organic brain lesion, the difference being that it would not leave a physical trace on the body which a physician could identify and give as evidence in a criminal trial. While in women, this absence was read as an evasive and duplicitous strategy at the somatic level, in men a supernatural trauma replaces pathology as the cause of behaviour which is not only irrational but *unconscious*. The use of the term 'frenzy' to describe Frankelin's actions contrasts with the absence of affect in narratives of maternal filicide. If an excess of emotion in men signifies a temporary aberration, the lack of emotion in women is demonstrative of criminal intention. What this suggests is that the phrase 'pathology' is predicated on a gender difference. A temporary deviation is not possible for women, because in them pathology is a latent condition. While the title page of *Pseudochristus* censures Frankelin and Gadbury equally, the text constructs a much more asymmetrical judgement of the events in Southampton which discloses seventeenth-century sexual norms.

The eroticized female body which Ellis represents is also present in another account of a notorious prophetic conspiracy, *A Brief Account and Discovery of the notorious falsehood and dissimulation contained in a Book styled,* The Gospel Way confirmed by Miracles (1649). Regardless of the actual gender of the author, the orientation of the narrative in relation to the female body is one of suspicion, which justifies representing the author as masculine. In the epistle to the reader, the anonymous author asserts that his

intention is to prevent others from being "*deservedly given up (as these Parties were) to believe Lyes uttered by seducing Impostures.*"[67] Insisting that these seducers are female, he prefaces his account of the *menage à trois* between Anne Wells, Matthew Hall and Nicholas Ware with examples from both ancient and recent history testifying to the devil's use of 'female deceivers' and 'strumpets.'[68]

The short biography of Anne Wells echoes the distrust of manifest female piety in Jacques Du Bosqu's conduct book *The Compleat Woman* (1639), quoted at the beginning of the first chapter. As the reader may recall, Du Bosqu argued that appropriate religious practices for women were those which were unseen. The female body which divulges its religious practices passes into the economy of gazes as a provocative object. Wells, an Anabaptist, elicits similar anxieties. Born in Stoke by Nayland, Suffolk, Wells disliked hard work and always listened assiduously to preaching. She claimed to be guilty of despair, the sin against the Holy Ghost, which none of the ministers she consulted were able to assauge. The local community believed that Wells made pretensions of spiritual suffering in order to elicit their sympathy. On several occasions she attempted to harm herself, but people were unconvinced that this was a symptom of acute despair. The author comments that Wells "seldome refused her food; she was of a fresh and healthful complexion, and could ordinarily, even at those times, be very merry and pleasant."[69] Wells's behaviour is measured against the sick 'role,' a social construct which specifies the criteria for incapacitation. The fact that her health appears to be robust confirms the assumption that the ostentatious display of female piety is suspicious. The consensus is that Wells's suffering constitutes a strategy for attention-seeking.

A Brief Representation is based upon the legal depositions of Anne Wells, but her viewpoint is constantly challenged by the voices of the Whatfield villagers. This interspersed narrative suggests the inherent duplicity of the feminine text. Its disintegration is not incidental, rather it is overdetermined. Wells met Matthew Hall, a taylor, and they lived together in the village of Whatfield in Suffolk. The third co-conspirator was a shoe-maker called Nicholas Ware. The conspiracy began when Ware and Hall claimed that Wells was possessed by a demon, which only they could exorcize. The events which followed are described in their book *The Gospel Way*. While the men fasted and prayed over several nights, Wells lay contorted on the bed, uttering prophanities "against God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost, not fit to be written." The exorcism ritual culminated with Hall and Ware commanding the serpent to leave her body in the name of Jesus Christ, at which Wells screamed out and the lay as if she was dead for half an hour. She then began to recover, and praised Christ for his mercy.

Despite the apparent success of the exorcism, Wells continued to have fits which she was "skilful to put her self into them at pleasure." Each time Hall and Ware 'cured' her. When she revived, Wells would utter "Revelations," in which she sometimes criticized ministers and protestant doctrines, and petitioned for universal grace and free will. On some occasions she spoke in tongues, which no-one present could interpret.[70]

Hall and Ware wrote their book about Wells's exorcism and travelled to London to give it to a printer. Wells stayed in Whatfield, where her fits continued. When they returned, she had another convulsion which she later admitted was a "counterfeit." Hall told Wells that God had revealed to him in London that her fits would end if she

married him. They were married the next Sunday. The villagers dispute that it was Hall who insisted on the marriage, claiming instead that Wells claimed to have had the revelation. They opposed the immediacy of the marriage, which Wells countered by maintaining that it was God's will.[71]

About one month later, Nicholas Ware told Wells about a revelation he had had: "she should have a child within three moneths, which should at a year old speak with tongues; but not unless he might have the carnal knowledg of her." Wells conferred with her husband, who told her to be "willing," since God willed it. The next night, Ware slept in their chamber (but in a separate bed). But Ware's 'prophecy' was not fulfilled, despite the fact that Wells's husband "thrust her several times towards him, and bad her be willing." In a marginal note, the author notes that the Whatfield villagers dispute Wells's account. Again, they allege that the revelation (and therefore the idea of polygamy) originated in Anne.[72] She claimed that she pleaded with Hall the next day never to agree to such a proposition again. When Hall relayed this information to Ware, the latter wept with apparent frustration, saying: "What, shall I lose another wife thus?"

The conspirators heard that their book, now published, would cause trouble, and they decided it would be politic to leave Whatfield. They went to Woodbridge, Suffolk, and spent all their money on buying jewellery and finery for Wells after Ware had a revelation that she should have the things that the Jews had had. They pretended to be ministers to obtain more money from the villagers and travelled to Holland, which according to Ware was the "wilderness" where they should remain for three and a half years.[73] Their money, however, only lasted for three weeks, and they returned to Whatfield, having

been away for just seven weeks. Wells demanded Hall how their brief sojourn could be reconciled with the prophecy. He ingeniously replied: "every fortnight for a year, and the odde week for halfe a year, and so made up the three years and a half."[74]

On January 16th, 1648, Wells had a terrifying dream about the Day of Judgement. She was convinced that she would be damned if she did not admit their deception. For four days she remained in bed, severely traumatized by the vision. Eventually, Wells confessed before the entire congregation of Whatfield church. The author comments that her confessions "are judged unfit to be turned into publique expressions to any modest reader." For a second time the author is explicit about eliding Wells's 'obscene' utterance. The entire text, which appears to reproduce Wells's 'version' only to subvert it, makes a similar point about the necessity of editing the female text, because it originates in a pathological body. Hall did not corroborate her admissions but instead accused her of committing adultery with Ware, and publically disowned her.[75] Rejected by both Whatfield and her husband, Wells was forced to stay with her mother in Stoke. She was pregnant. Summoned before the Justice of the Peace, she reprised her confession. Hall also attended, together with some of the villagers who tried to exonerate both him and Ware. The magistrate ordered the reluctant Hall to provide for his wife. Despite formally acknowledging his responsibility in court, Hall deserted his wife on the road home to Whatfield.[76]

The intentional ambivalence of the text fails to establish the precise nature of the sexual liaisons between Wells, Hall and Ware, while the villagers raise sufficient doubts about key details in Wells's account to implicate her as the prime deceiver and instigator. To the Whatfield community, what has occurred is less an

organized conspiracy and more a *folie à deux*. This madness which is the product of being seduced (or infected) by a partner connotes, like William Frankelin's "spiritual frenzy," transient dissociative behaviour which, due to its very abnormality, allows the possibility of mitigation. But the woman cannot be a 'victim' of frenzy or *folie* in the way that a man can, because she is the catalyst, if not the cause of the dissociation. Wells is ostracized because in her deception and opportunism precede the 1648 conspiracy. She fabricated religious despair as a manipulative strategy for material and emotional gain, a type of behaviour which today would be recognized as a factitious disorder. As we have seen, if an individual exhibiting this behaviour involves others (especially children) in their deception, they are more likely to be regarded as criminally responsible rather than 'sick' or themselves vulnerable. As antisectarian texts which alert their (male) readers to the insidious allure of heresy, *Pseudochristus* and *A Brief Representation* regard men as especially vulnerable to the female sectarian. Hall and Ware are re-assimilated as prodigal sons. Instead of being seen as abusers, they participate in the village's collective sense of itself as a victim.

Members of the village collude with Hall in the ritual by which Wells becomes first a socially dead person (she has no advocates within the community and is stripped of her social status), and secondly is completely excluded from Whatfield, abandoned in a vulnerable condition without any means of economic or social support. The significant differences in the attribution of blame and the decision by Hall and the villagers to defy the magistrate's instructions can be explained by the fact that Wells' s transgressions, unlike those of the two men, are regarded as

unmitigated. She has not only committed blasphemy and embezzled community funds, but is also guilty of adultery and wifely disobedience. In fact, her crimes are arguably sexual rather than religious, which is why no form of community rehabilitation is attempted. Wells bears out what men suspect about female sexuality. The fact that it is she who is instrumental in dismantling the deception becomes irrelevant, since the dream which provokes her confession testifies to the instability of the female body. Wells primarily exposes *herself* rather than her co-conspirators; furthermore, she is compelled to reveal the truth, she has not chosen to do it because of any moral obligations. *A Brief Account* exemplifies the commonplace of fantasies of female criminality: that in spite of the woman's efforts to evade detection, her psyche will eventually disintegrate and implicate her.

Why is it that the woman's account is disbelieved? Figuring the woman as a scapegoat appears to be necessary in order to maintain the myth of the prodigal son. An alternative explanation of the events described in *Pseudochristus* and *A Brief Account* is to attribute to the male actor a form of megalomania, which leads to the seduction of an 'innocent' woman. This, presumably, is what Anne Wells tried to prove in her confession. Her version is not explicitly refuted by the author of *A Brief Account*, but is instead problematized by the apparent consensus formed by the Whatfield villagers.

Is a relationship in which the male is a seducer/master and the female an innocent/slave plausible? The legal reaction to a seventeenth-century infanticide case which apparently exemplifies such a relationship does not attribute any responsibility to the man involved. It also disregards the factors which are conducive towards maternal negligence, such as social isolation, poverty and community

disapproval. In *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants* Mary Goodenough, an impoverished widow, embarks upon an adulterous affair with a baker after he promised to give her some money. She became pregnant and gave birth in secret to a stillborn child. Goodenough was found guilty of infanticide and executed.[77] The rigid gender asymmetry which is evident in early modern heresiography appears to deny the possibility of modifying sexual dynamics, but is late twentieth-century culture any less subject to totalizing assumptions about the relationship between sexuality and criminality?

Pertinent to this discussion is the case of Myra Hindley, the 'Moors murderess,' whose attempts to represent herself as the infatuated victim of Ian Brady in letters to the relatives of her victims and to newspapers have elicited condemnation and anger, primarily because anything Hindley says is regarded as an attempt by her to mitigate her crimes. The reaction to her suggests that it is highly problematic for the murderess to speak. On the day of her execution, Mary Goodenough "said, or did little there but dy'd; only beg'd of the People to be warn'd against her Sins, by her shameful and untimely End. And indeed, without a Miracle almost, it could not be expected she should say much more." The author explains Goodenough's lack of speech as due to physical weakness. She was incarcerated in prison for two months after the child's birth awaiting trial, a period of recuperation for the new mother known as lying-in.[78] The fact that Goodenough's state of health impairs her speech removes the possibility that she might contest what is said about her.

The important point is that it is fundamentally unacceptable for a woman who has committed serious violent crime to represent herself in language. The sole exception to this is if her speech mirrors

cultural attitudes towards her. Myra Hindley's intelligence has always been publicized, especially the fact that she took an Open University degree in prison. Her comments about her crimes and her relationship with Ian Brady have consistently been regarded as 'manipulative.' In 1992 Hindley commented:

> he was good-looking. I was very impressionable. I thought I loved him, but I realize now with 20 years' hindsight that I was infatuated, and that infatuation grew into an obsession. He was God. It was as if there was a part of me that didn't belong to me, that hadn't been there before and wasn't there afterwards. I'm not saying he took over my mind or anything, or that I wasn't responsible for what I did, but I just couldn't say 'no' to him. He decided everything.[79]

For Hindley to describe a man who was not only an athiest but also a fascist as 'God' is patently subversive. She does not simply claim that she became obsessed with Brady to the exclusion of everything else, including religion, but that the intensity of their sexual relationship meant that Brady actually became a substitute for God. It is undoubtedly easier to perceive a violent woman as a 'monster' rather than confront the heretical implications of her claims of victimization. The seduction narrative which she articulates constitutes a sexual theology in which the male lover replaces God. It seems that anxieties about the sacriligious connotations of male seduction elide the 'other' story which is implied in the testimonies of Anne Wells, Mary Adams and Mary Goodenough.

If mitigation is available to men like William Frankelin and Matthew Hall, it is denied to women, for whom the only possible

position is that of the scapegoat. To elucidate further how the issue of prodigality is predicated upon gender difference, I want to examine the appropriation of female despair in conversion narratives.

'Things will go backeward:` Gender, Histrionics and The Household

In the preceding chapter, we briefly discussed George Trosse's account of his spiritual conversion. Trosse's text is typical of conversion narratives written by men in its enactment of the myth of the prodigal son. Trosse sates himself in metropolitan debauchery and has a vision of his own imminent damnation while he lies on his bed in a drunken stupor. In this chapter, I have argued that this myth is unavailable to women who transgress, as is evinced by the disparity between the nature of the sanctions imposed on men and women who have committed the same crime. Insisting on the necessity of surveillance, accounts of maternal transgression construct women as not only irresponsible, but as infantile.

Given that the mother's position is more akin to that of the daughter, it is useful to compare the sectarian mother with another contemporary form of 'excessive` female religiosity, which I am terming conversion disorder. This phrase, the reader may recall, usually refers to psychiatric conditions in which psychic disturbances are manifested as bodily symptoms. I do not want to suggest that early modern women who were afflicted with despair were actually hysterical, but to show that what links nineteenth-century therapy for hysteria with the intervention of ministers in seventeenth-century cases of female despair is an attempt to ameliorate the violations inflicted upon the family romance by the

disruptive energy of the daughter's disobedience.

Comparing accounts of female religious despair with male conversion narratives reveals that while the latter is about repentance and maturation, the former is about the disintegration of the family and, in particular, the challenge to the father's authority. The role of excess within religious experience is gendered. While the prodigal son narrative presupposes geographical distance from the household, female despair takes place within its claustrophobic environs. The fact that intervention from a minister is judged necessary is suggestive not only of the woman's inability to conquer religious despair on her own, but also of the severe stress it places upon family dynamics.

As a narrative, female despair is radically different from the conversion narrative, where the author recounts his own experiences. Women's religious despair is reconstituted in mediated texts, in which male auditors censor the 'obscenity' of female utterance/body (as we saw in *A Brief Representation*) and transform the experience of suffering into an instructive, didactic work. As I have argued, deviant behaviour in women is perceived as an amplification, rather than a perversion, of their normative functioning. Notions of female madness as chaotic and destructive inform narratives of female despair, which emphasize the divine authority and perseverance of the minister in achieving mastery over an unstable and wild female figure.

Unlike the staged exorcism rituals in *A Brief Account*, relations between the despairing woman (whom I will call a 'demoniac' for the sake of brevity, since Satan was implicated as the cause of such spiritual malaises) and the minister were characterized by resistance rather than submission. The 'symptoms' of affliction did

not miraculously disappear as soon as the minister walked into the room. The demoniac did not spontaneously recover after one visit. Repeated visits were often necessary, or sometimes the minister would remain in the household for a number of weeks or even months. His work was arduous and difficult. The demoniac might barricade herself in a room and refuse to admit him, or be abusive towards him. The minister had to be a consummate strategist in order to defeat her ruses.

An important element of the minister's role is to reinforce the authority which the demoniac had challenged with her violence. The enforcement of patriachal authority was explicated in manuals of household management. In *A Godly Form of Hovseholde Gouernement* (1598), John Dod and Robert Cleaver warned husbands that "wrest[ing] away their wiues infirmities" would increase female obstinacy. Instead, the husband should make use of reverse psychology (act "contrariwise" as the authors put it), and use "sweet words, and louing exhortations" to reestablish his dominance.[80] The minister effectively acted as a surrogate father, who contained the daughter's antics with subtle and covert methods.

Such methodology is demonstrated in the case of Joan Drake, a woman who was afflicted by despair for ten years. During this period, she was seen by a number of ministers who achieved varying degrees of success. Several times Drake entered a period of remission, but her depression invariably returned. In *Trodden Down Strength* (1647), John Hart describes how Drake's mental health began to deteriorate when she was forced into an arranged marriage. Her despair was exacerbated because she was "much wronged by her Midwife" who attended the birth of her daughter, which resulted in a long and difficult delivery.[81] Psychiatrists today would diagnose Drake as

suffering from post-partum psychosis. Drake became increasingly 'unmanageable,' despite the efforts of her husband, Francis Drake, and her parents. Aside from being depressed, there were episodes in which Joan broke into "some outrage." Hart describes the extent of her transformation: "strange desperate speeches, unruly carriage, far from her former naturall constitution: sometime slighting and laughing at all said and done unto her." Her relatives had her watched around the clock by two gentlewomen.[82]

John Dod, a minister from Cannons-Ashby, Northamptonshire, and no relation to the co-author of *A Godly Forme*, was asked to visit Drake who was living at her parents' house in Esher. Although she was not informed that he was coming, by some "subtly of the devil" she knew the moment he entered the house, and barricaded herself in a room. When her husband threatened to smash the door, she let Dod in.[83] Joan Drake resisted Dod's attempts at prayer by refusing to listen or laughing. Dod stayed for a month, returned after four weeks and made numerous attempts at urging Drake to repent, but she remained intractable. She attempted suicide by swallowing pins and gorging on oranges. This last "proved excellent medicines unto her," causing the expulsion of an "abundane of black ugly filthy matter, which made her look much better."[84] The fact that the intended method of suicide has the opposite effect, purging some of the 'filth' ascribed to the female interior, testifies to God's providence working on an unwilling and desperate woman.

Drake was convinced that she was a reprobate. Her sins were too numerous for any attempts at piety now to make any difference. She resolved to abandon herself to carnal desire. Dod became exhausted by Drake's intransigence. A pattern was set where Dod and other ministers would visit Joan and try to help her, only to become

frustrated by her rude and blasphemous behaviour. On one occasion, Dod discussed Drake's suicidal behaviour. He asked her a question: "*if now she were to be condemned to be burnt, or hanged, drawn and tortured, to be first racked, scourged, and many times whipped and tortured; whether she would not esteem it to be a high favor and promotion, to be reprieved and respited for ten or twenty years...to live longer?*"[85]

Drake who, Hart emphasizes, did "not perceiv[e] his scope and drift in the question," admitted that she would prefer to have her suffering postponed. Dod "taking her lovingly in the hand and smiling," asked Drake why she had persisted in trying to take her own life, since the sufferings of hell compounded any that could be inflicted on earth. In any case, he insisted, "*it is uncertain whether ever you shall go* [to hell] *or not, but that God in the use of means will soften your heart and save you?*" For Drake to cause her own premature death was "*madness and extream folly.*"[86] Hart remarks that Drake had been converted by her own words: she was "in some sort caught now." She grasped the minister's hand, and assured him that she "*no more jealousy or suspicion might be had, for now she was so by him convinced, that she was resolved to live so long as God would permit her.*"[87]

This incident in *Trodden Down Strength* portrays the rhetorical victory of a male minister over a weak and disordered woman. She is 'found out' by his words, and her histrionic violence, the product of excessive affect, is dissipated. She (temporarily) becomes the good wife/daughter: compliant, modest, silenced. What is implicit in the plethora of texts which are concerned with policing female behaviour is that standing up to scrutiny is something that women *never* do. The irrationality of their resistance is evinced by the way it fragments

under male interrogation. Hart's account emphasizes Joan Drake's intellectual inferiority as she is directed towards a refutation of her own behaviour. As an example of how the maternal or feminine text is 'edited' by a masculine voice, John Dod's confident and manipulative speech exposes the inadequacies of Joan Drake's beliefs.

Unlike the representation of the male atheist in texts like *The Second Spira* (1692) and *The Arminian Haltered* (1641), in which excessively liberal thinking leads to a dangerous seduction into irreligion, women's atheistic declarations are regarded as fallacious, arising from an intellect which is deficient instead of arrogant. Frank N., the subject of *The Second Spira*, was a highly-educated man who began to associate with a group of intellectual atheists. As its title suggests, *The Second Spira* was promoted as a sequel to Nathaniel Bacon's *A Relation of the Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira, in the Yeare 1548* (1638), the English version of the case of an Italian lawyer who recanted his protestant beliefs to save his family from the Inquisition and afterwards suffered severe guilt. Frank N. lived extravagantly and immorally in the company of athiests, until he fell into a severe state of depression, convinced that, as a reprobate who had abjured God, he was destined for hell. The author, H.L., was a close friend of Frank N., and visited him while he lay in bed, attempting to persuade him to repent.

One of the atheists with whom Frank N. had previously associated wrote to him and suggested that his fear of damnation was the product of a sickness, an interpretation Frank completely rejected. He asked H.L. to transcribe a reply. Part of it reads: "*I have only concerned myself as to the rationality of your Letter, that I might induce you to believe I am not melancholy, distracted, or prejudic'd in my*

Reason...what I am going to say may not have the less credit, because it comes from one under my circumstances: its Truth, and whether you will believe me or no, you will at last find it to be so."[88] Throughout his ordeal, Frank N. remains articulate, convinced of his fate and derisive of any attempts to 'cure' him. Even the physicians who examine him admit they can do nothing "so long as the Disturbance of his Mind was the Cause of his Weakness."[89] But the important point is that Frank N. is not considered mad by anyone who comes to see him.

Just as Frank N.'s intellectual arrogance caused his descent into atheism, it perpetuates his conviction that he is a reprobate, a condition which all around him acknowledge to be intractable. The link between atheism and the intellect is pointed out by Richard Bentley in *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism Demonstrated* (1699) when he remarked that atheists reject the "Religion" in which they have had their "Education."[90] An atheist perverts his intellect to justify his carnal desires. The futility of atheistic thought is demonstrated in *The Second Spira*. Frank N.'s conversations with H.L. are philosophical in tone, in which Frank mediates on the plausibility of damnation and his friend challenges his increasing sense of sin, but the inevitability of Frank's miserable death makes all efforts at intervention essentially irrelevant. Even as Frank N. rebels against Christian orthodoxy, his linguistic pyrotechnics demonstrate his awareness of the reality which dictates that he must be damned.

While the spectators to Frank N.'s demise acknowledge that the consequences of his atheism are frighteningly logical, the knowing smile with which John Dod confronts Joan Drake indicates that the considerable difficulties which women's irreligion presents the

minister with are faintly ridiculous as well as far from insummountable. That is not to say that Dod does not appreciate the gravity of the situation, but that the method of alleviating Drake's despair involves exposing the error of her belief in her own damnation. Women are not inveterate atheists. Drake's depression vindicates John Dod's skill and dedication, whether she recovers from it or not. The text concludes with Drake's 'good' death, which justifies the ministers' efforts and establishes a sense of closure and resolution to the demoniac's disorder.

During a conversation with John Dod, Joan Drake confessed that she felt "*quite destitute of all naturall affection unto Husband, Father, Mother, Children.*"[91] When Dod attempts to help her, a transference is effected whereby she displaces her antagonism and resentment onto him. How are we to interpret Drake's behaviour? Does she enjoy receiving the ministers' attention, as John Stachniewski suggests? He argues that women like Drake, Sarah Wight and Hannah Allen manifest what he describes as "a grotesque form of compensatory masochism."[92] Stachniewski regards the despair episodes as performances designed to attract the official/masculine gaze and elicit emotional and material gratification.

An analogous reading of female histrionics is present in Robert Brudenell Carter's *On The Pathology And Treatment Of Hysteria* (1853), published when he was just twenty-five years of age. Carter regarded hysteria less as a group of clinical symptoms and more as a set of negative personality traits. The text enunciates Carter's views on relations between the hysteric and the physician, just as I have been arguing that early modern accounts of female despair disclose the interaction between the demoniac and her minister. Carter theorized three types of hysterical attack or paroxysm. While

the cause of primary hysteria is "some original and fresh emotion," secondary and tertiary paroxysms are generated by the memory of an emotion. What distinguishes the second and third types is that whereas the former is caused by spontaneous or induced recollection, the latter constitutes the intentional recovery of a traumatic memory by the patient.[93] Although the desire for sympathy is universal, "it is found to be so with women in a tenfold ratio, the desire itself being actually stronger, and the sense of self-dependence being comparatively feeble." According to Carter, women "crave" the attention of others, and will go to extreme lengths to secure it.[94]

Female hysterics become adept at manipulating their family's emotions, but they may desire the greater rewards of performing before a wider, public audience. Carter remarks that the demands on the hysteric to "do something at once fascinating and unique" mean that mere hysterical posturing is insufficiently dramatic for spectators outside of the household. The hysteric is liable to cultivate religious sensibilities, and appear before spectators as deeply pious.[95] Carter emphasizes that such pretensions to devotion serve to iterate her corruption and perversity.[96] It is when Carter broaches the subject of tertiary hysteria that he articulates the role of the physician, whose role as a dispenser of morality is arguably more important than his therapeutic prescriptions. Anticipating the twentieth-century notion of co-dependency, Carter stipulates that: "no system of *moral* treatment can be effectively carried out, so long as the patient remains in her own home...[There] the patient will always possess the means to baffle the plans of her medical attendant, and will not fail to use them, if the deceptive element be at all a strongly-marked feature of her case" (italics my

emphasis).[97] The hysteric must be isolated from her family, whom she has 'trained' to supply her with as much sympathy as she requires.

Once the physician has arranged for the hysteric to be accommodated in his home, the battle may commence. In point of fact describing it as such constitutes no spurious use of metaphor, since Carter articulates the treatment of hysteria in specifically military terms. He fully anticipates the hysteric's resistance. Carter asserts that the physician must avoid colluding in the hysteric's fabrications. He must inform her straight away that he "knows, not only how many of her symptoms or ailments are self-produced, but also the exact manner or train of thought, by which they are set going on each occasion." Carter advises that the hysteric will probably deny this vehemently, but the physician must continue with a complete analysis of her case. The patient is not only treated by the physician as an adversary but is also presented with military intelligence about herself. She is transparent before him: he has already worked out her motives, her fictitious symptoms and, as a result, how to defeat--which?--the illness or her.[98]

The treatment consists of inducing an acute sense of shame in the hysteric for her actions. The physician must not only bring to her attention the minutiae of her deception, but also deliver his interpretation of how each act evinces her florid psychopathology. The hysteric may show signs of contrition during this interrogation exercise, in which case the physician can assure her that her case is treatable and that when her antisocial behaviour is eradicated, she can return to her former life. In addition, the physician should tell his patient that: "he will abstain from exposing her, either to members of her own family or of his, so long as she manifests a

sincere desire for amendment."[99]

The threat of exposure is used in the event of non-compliance, which to Carter is the failure to resolve an antisocial trait within a prescribed period of time. He insists that it is critical that the hysteric recognize the dominant position of the physician. This in itself, he remarks, will "almost compel submission." If the hysteric becomes angry and knocks her chair over, she must be ordered to sit down and "conduct herself like a lady." Similarly, interruptions should not be tolerated. The physician should speak in well-modulated tones without emotion, "in such a manner..that the command will be immediately obeyed."[100]

Towards the end of the text, Carter reiterates that it is essential for the physician to have total control over his patient if the treatment is to be successful: "I myself would always stipulate for a complete transfer of parental authority." The family must not object to any decision that the physician makes. Carter asserts that the hysteric's position is synonymous with a school pupil over whom the master wields absolute authority, whether the parents like it or not.[101] And, one might add, whether the *pupil* likes it or not, except that Carter never gives serious consideration to the hysteric's opinion of his therapeutic method. In fact, when she responds with anger, denial or tears, it vindicates the efficacy of the treatment. The moralizing, militaristic tone of *On The Pathology and Treatment Of Hysteria* suggests that hysteria in the mid-nineteenth-century was seen as a 'social' problem relating specifically to the family. Treatment was aggressive and punitive, as befits the moral criminal which Carter argued was what the hysteric constituted.

Early modern accounts of female histrionicism never approach the explicitness of Carter's thesis in the negative representation of

women's resistance. But there are numerous similarities in terms of the intra-familial conflict which the demoniac generates. The texts do not attempt to resolve the profound ambivalence which the histrionic woman gives rise to. In *Trodden Down Strength*, John Dod is often so offended by Joan Drake's language that he leaves her. But at one point the author John Hart comments that her rudeness was "spoken as it appeared against her will, to prove him [Dod] only."[102] The ability of a woman to speak the language of resistance is being undermined because the text is promoting the minister's perseverance. This does not mean that her husband and family do not find her behaviour upsetting or unacceptable. Not exactly mad or bad and never a prodigal daughter, the histrionic woman is still out of place even within the conversion narrative, supposedly a legitimate space for excessive female emotion.

If Robert Carter Brudenell envisaged himself as a surrogate father, the male minister adopted a similar role when he accepted the task of confronting the daughter's malaise. But, whether despair or hysteria, the problem is never seen within the context of family relationships, such as Joan Drake's dissatisfaction with her arranged marriage. Hart implicates her difficult birth as the main cause of her depression. Sarah Wight, whose case is documented Henry Jesse in *The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced By the Spirit of Grace, in an Empty Nothing Creature* (1647), suffered episodes of despair for four years after witnessing her mother's depression as a child. When she recovers, Wight speaks about her experiences as a way of giving hope to others suffering from religious afflictions. However, the majority of those she counsels are women: men discuss theological matters with her, but they do not figure significantly among the afflicted.

In the epistle to the reader, Henry Jesse comments: "It is hoped the LORD will still keep her Soul in that humble frame."[103] The conventionality of a woman's speech after her recovery is problematic, since her embrace of an affliction she subsequently regards as 'good' and the renunciation of her former ungrateful self elides the role of the family in the cause of her suffering. A comment in a letter Sarah Wight wrote to a friend (which was published in 1656) is meaningful in the context of the cultural reconstitution of female histrionics. Her mother, now widowed, remains "tossed with many tempests of temptations." Wight sorrowfully admits that she "sees so much evil in her" that she doubts her mother will ever fully recover. She encourages her mother to believe that her suffering "is a token for good," because the "more vile" it appears to human eyes, the more precious the affliction is to God.[104] If the genesis of psychic suffering occurs within the family, the efforts of seventeenth-century ministers and nineteenth-century physicians merely serve to palliate the family's discontents. Despite the fact that the rehabilitated woman articulates the Calvinist notions of moral responsibility which construct her as the scapegoat, this does not mean that the underlying familial conflict has been resolved.

The fact that women's experiences are appropriated by editors, ministers and physicians indicates that self-aggrandizement should be imputed not at the women themselves, but at those responsible for publishing her suffering. Even when texts are apparently written by a woman, male editors are involved in emending, deleting or adding to the textual product which is made available to the reader. These contributions may not necessarily be apparent. I am not suggesting that men were necessarily guilty of exploiting women's religious experiences, but I do want to problematize the validity of male

interpretation. As we saw in *Trodden Down Strength,* Joan Drake's refusal of John Dod's aid is read as the involuntary product of her delusions and not as opposition. A significant, if tantalizing, question is what is elided by masculine intervention. Elizabeth Carey's biography was written by one of her daughters. Carey became a Catholic recusant, causing her husband Henry Carey, Lord Falkland, considerable embarrassment when his attempts to persuade her to recant failed. The manuscript of *The Lady Falkland Her Life* was edited before it was submitted to the publishers by her son, Patrick Carey, who deleted what he regarded as overtly feminine parts and added some of his own. While the editor of the Catholic Publishing & Bookselling Company, R.S., places Patrick's additions in square brackets to differentiate them from the daughter's text, what has been erased cannot be identified.[105]

It should not surprise us that Eleanor Davies arranged the publication of her own texts so assiduously. A publisher as well as author, Davies was aware that her texts contravened the censorship regulations of Charles I's government not simply because they were politically sensitive, but because they were written by a woman. Eleanor Davies's epitaph, written by her daughter Lucy, judged her "In a womans body a man's spirit."[106] The exact sentiments which to Lucy signified exceptionality in terms of erudition, morality and courage conjured in a patriarchal culture up the chimera, the half-man, half-woman monster referred to by Dod and Cleaver. Davies's representation of Archbishop Laud as a murderous father constitutes a recognition of the valency of the monstrous mother within early modern culture. Contesting this mythology, she portrays herself as a victimized, not an abusive, mother.

As this chapter has shown, notions of women's latent pathology made

an imperative of patriarchal surveillance, and this scrutiny was extended into the represention of female experience in print culture. This is not to say that what I have termed the mediated text denied women the possibility of agency: indeed, in many of the texts I have examined women speak for themselves in spite of the attempts to regulate their bodies and voices. The very excess which accounts of female criminality warn against resists efforts to contain it. There are maternal and feminine narratives in early modern culture, but we need to recognize that these are narratives under pressure: indeed, they are disrupted narratives. Recovering the female subject in accounts of hysteria, female despair and prophecy requires that we re-view the authority of the masculine subject position through which seventeenth-century women's experience is negotiated.

Notes

1 Germaine Greer, Susan Hastings, Jeslyn Medoff, Melinda Sansone (eds.), *Kissing The Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 12.

2 Mary Carey, *Meditations from the Note Book of Mary Carey 1649-1657* (London: Francis Meynell, 1918), pp. 13-14.

3 Ibid, p. 15.

4 Ibid, p. 16.

5 Ibid, p. 18.

6 Ibid, pp. 19-20.

7 Ibid, p. 22.

8 Ibid, p. 26.

9 Ibid, p. 29.

10 Ibid, pp. 31-32.

11 Ibid, pp. 35-36.

12 See Patricia Crawford, 'The construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England,' in Valerie Fildes (ed.), *Women As Mothers In Pre-Industrial England* The Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, (London, Routledge, 1990), 3-38, (p. 19).

13 Eleanor Davies, *The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal* (London, 1646), pp. 9-10.

14 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun. Depression And Melancholia*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York & Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1987, English translation 1989), p. 88.

15 Aristotle (Pseud), *The Experienc'd Midwife*, made English by W.S., fourth edition, London, no date or place of publication, p. 144.

16 Paul Delany, 'Constantine the African, *De Coitu*. A translation,' *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970), 55-65, (p. 57).

17 Aristotle (Pseud), *On the Generation of Animals*, translated by A.L. Peck, Loeb Classical Library, (London: Heinemann, 1943), II, iv, p. 181; & I, lxix, p. 91.

18 John Sadler, *The Sicke Womans Private Looking Glasse* (London, 1636), Bodleian Library Lister A14 facsimile edition, (Amsterdam, New Jersey: Walter Johnson, 1977), pp. 138-9. Critical studies on the relationship between teratogenesis and the mother's imagination in the early modern period include Marilyn Francis, 'The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope,' *English Literary History* 61 (1994), 829-851; Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Anne Jacobson Schutte, '"Such Monstrous Births": A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985), 85-106.

19 Ibid, p. 142.

20 Ibid, sig. A6v.

21 Ibid, pp. 139-140.

22 Anon, *A Pittilesse Mother. That most vnaturally at one time, murthered two of her owne Children at Acton within sixe miles from London uppon holy Thursday last 1616. The ninth of May. Being a Gentlewoman named Margaret Vincent wife of Mr. Iarius Vincent of the same Towne. With her Examination, Confession and true discouery of all the proceedings in the said bloody accident* (London? 1616), sig. A2r.

23 Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned. Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 224.

24 Patricia Crawford, 'The construction and experience of maternity

in seventeenth-century England,' p. 9.

25 Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex. Scientific, Religious and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 148.

26 John Dod & Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Hovseholde Gouernement* (London, 1598), p. 218.

27 Anon., *Bloody Newes from Dover. Being A True Relation of the great and bloudy Murder, committed by Mary Champion (an Anabaptist) who cut off her Childs head, being 7 weekes old, and held it to her husband to baptize* (London? 1646), title page.

28 *A Pittilesse Mother*, title page.

29 Paul Britton, *The Jigsaw Man* (London: Corgi, 1998), p. 46.

30 *Bloody Newes*, sig. A2v.

31 Ibid, sig. A3r.

32 *A Pittilesse Mother*, sig. A2v.

33 Ibid, sig. A3r.

34 Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill*, quoted in Allison Morris & Ania Wilczynski, 'Rocking the cradle. Mothers who kill their children,' in Helen Birch (ed.), *Moving Targets. Women, Murder And Representation* (London: Virago, 1993), 198-217 (p.200).

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Appendix 1:

Transcription of British Library Additional MS 4432, ff 2r-5v: Extract of a Letter of Nathaniel Fairfax, M.D., of Woodbridge, Suffolk,to Henry Oldenburg Esq., London. Dated June 28th, 1669. Contained in the Supplement to the Letter Books of the Royal Society, p. 277.

f.2r:

***The entertainment of the present Address is to be a Relation of self starving, which having had the luck to take Air beyond & wide of you, I thought in time some story or other thereabouts might haply arrive at you. I therefore more to gratify your Curiosity, than that I judge it very instructive philosophically, I have taken occassion to pen it, & that brokenly too, as I found it in my loose Diary, being as follows:

Mts. Jane Taunton, a maiden Lady, about twen-ty three, descended from Ancestors of Condition near this place, & sojourning under the same roof with my self, very fat of Body, but handsome, having appetite & Digestion both of Solids & Liquides beyond what is usuall with those of her Qualifications, being no farther concerned with Religion than as imagined heroicallnes was the mea-sure of it, a devoted Affecter of Romances, with the Life & Soul whereof she was practically spirited, as a good

f.2v:

Christian is with that of the Bible: of a spirit super-latively high & precipitating, averse to second thoughts, & pertinacious: Otherwise well accomplished & deserving, in the latter End of March last took a pense[1] upon a neglect, as she thought, of some concern'd in the improvement of that, whence She, being an orphan, should derive the

accommodations of Life. When perceiving her Accounts growing beyond what she could answer from her propir Income or other gentell method she resolved upon stinting her expenses by a new found Invention of fasting, till Death should set her beyond the reach of secular Wants. Her principle was this, that it was more commendable for her to die than to do any thing unworthy of her as a Gentlewoman; but to be beholden to kindred for assistence of livelihood, or otherwise betake herself to the Artifices of the Yeomanry, was such. Now as for laying violent hands on herself, she was against that, because the fruit of an hasty passion or moodiness, which were rudenesses ill becoming such a Daugh-

f.3r:

ter of Reason & Courtship, as she must bear herself. But because Convenience for a generous Way of dieting could not be procured without gratuities from friends, she con-ceived herself no ways sound to uphold her Body by these ignoble supports. Nor might this be self murther any more than a soldiers exposing his body in the field, when a cowardly flight might save him. As for the thwartings of holy Writ, she was not very carefull to salve them; for concluding this to be virtuous, she knew whatever was so, must needs be religious. Upon this foot she stood ag[ains]t all the World, & April 1st bigan to take up in Diet, only eating a jumball[2] or two as a treat, & drinking short of her wont. Second day she betook herself only to small Beer, of which she took some-times three, sometimes two glasses, sometimes less; at which rate she held on for about a fortnight, eating nothing; forsaking also Tobacco (of which she had been a taker) from the First Day. During this time she lived under extreme hunger & cravings, & had scurvy remembrances by gripes & stitches, which not being able sometimes to keep to herself, when

f.3v:

with us, she was fain to retire. (Yet the second week, she said, was better than the first).

About the middle of Aprill she fell again to To-bacco, which in two or three days gave her two or three stools, a Way of Evacuation, which till then had been wanting from the first day: Nor did that Effect from Tobacco last any longer than those three days. At a fortnight's End, her Arms & Hands grew deadish & winterly (which before were fair enough) & so continued, her face wan, except when passion had stirred her.

About three Weeks End she had her catamen in course, when in five or six Days time she suck'd the juice of six China oranges. Nearer the month's end to cure the furrings of her Tongue, she suck'd sparingly certain Seville oranges. Her mouth growing scorbuticall, & her Gums bleeding, for which she used by way of Gargle Salt & Water.

Apr. 30 She suck'd part of a Limon, & then she abated of her Beer-drinking,. only the third part of the Glass

f.4r:

-tumbler, holding in all but vi oz & many days none at all; only from thence to the 11th or 12th of May she had taken down the juice of fivteen Limons. Most nights she slept not till four in the morning, between which and ten she had usually three or four broken sleeps. Then her flesh wasted sensibly; the skin shrunk, & scurf shed off. She was always cold to the touch, & her feet, she told me, colder than her hands, to her own sense, her pulse very low, her urine lixiviall, of a deeper adust citrine[3] than that of the scurvy.

The 11th day walking in her Bed. Chamber, her Spirits failed her, & she fell down & hurt her arms whereupon she gave over walking afterwards. Where-as her Bed used to warm her, after she had lain a

little while in it, now she remained cold night & day. Her Head ached, her Legs pained her at the Bone. In the heat of the Day she was best. The sun declining, at four or five she was forc'd thro' cold to bed, yet could she not bear a fire in her Chamber: it

f.4v:

made her faint, she said. For air-sake she al-ways kept her casement open by the bedside. She gave over her fine needle-work (at which she was ingeni-ous beyond most Gentlewomen) a fortnight e'er this, and also reading, because her Eyes pained her upon any looking.

17th she rose between twelve & one, & then & thenceforward could only sit up till her bed was made.

18th She could gain no Rest in bed, & was so as never before, wild in her head, so as she could not lie down, her head fared so confusedly. She complained of a coldness in her stomack & pain in her side, desir'd Beer, & had her Courses out of course.

19th? Sitting up as before, she complain'd her Head was giddy, & legs trembled; & she bid me she Believed her palate was more critical than when well.

From 22nd to 25th took a little Vinegar, & scarce any juice of limon: but 26th returned to juice again.

27th & 28th full of fainting fits. 29th & 30th slept

f.5r:

often, & was faint at waking all day long. 30th & 31st drank nothing.

June 1st, 2nd, drank nothing, nor 3rd till night, having spent the day in frequent faintings, for which she only used refreshing salts. From the [4th] to 6th she sweat often, & that night burnt extremely: so held on 7th 8th & 9th. abating in her Beer, and had several agonies & throwes[4] night & day: Those broke on her again almost in course. 10th

her throwes increased, which she had hitherto been like a Roman: Now they extorted out-cries. So she continued much in the Condition of a Woman in travel at times. To 16th she devoured more Oranges, to strengthen I suppose, but she said because they grew drier. Then either thro' fear of Death, or sense of pain, or both she was fain to give in, & rising betimes dress'd for a walk, which she was confident she could go thro', her spirit was so bent upon it. Accordingly by the help of my self on one side, & her nurse on the other, after seven or eight rests we halled her a mile out of Town, where

f.5v:

she took horse & rode at night to Ipswitch. That day she began to feed on buttered peas, which she told me made her sick; after that a pint of straw-berries & that day Nature befriended her by stool, afterwards & fish & bread. Flesh-meat she cannot yet bear. Butter is still offensive. Last Wednesday she told me, she thought she should have died, being afflicted all day with Head-ach & fainting. Her Countenance is palish & wan as much as ever: & she is now taking Diet with as much waryness, as she had forsaken it with rashness, being at present as great an Instance of a trifling Resolver, as she was before of an adventurous Faster.

This Account I could easily gather, she coming daily t[o] my Lodging, whilst able, & I waiting upon her almost every day in her Chamber, when Weakness had confined her. Asking her towards the end of her fasting, how her stomack stood to fictuals she answered me, that she neither craved food, nor loathed it. As for corner-bits,[5] I believe she had none. The Instance to me is confirming to that coinman Rimord, *Natura paucio contenta*.[6]

...If I have been too tedious, pray pardon it, to

Your most humble & affect. servt.

Notes

1 French for 'thought,' here meaning 'resolution.'

2 A 'jumball' is a type of sweet bun or doughnut.

3 Uroscopy (the inspection of the patient's urine) constituted an important diagnostic practice within Galenic medicine, since its practitioners diagnosed illness on the basis of fluids which were excreted from the body. This practice was declining during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it became associated with 'quackery.' Here, Fairfax describes the results of his analysis of Taunton's urine. 'Lixiviall' refers to the process of lixiviation, in which the constituent parts of the urine are separated into soluble and insoluble elements. Taunton's urine is brownish-yellow in appearance, in contrast to the urine typical of patients suffering from scurvy.

4 Throes or convulsions.

5 'Snacks,' implying those consumed secretively.

6 Latin: "Nature is content with little."

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